

Honour without Renown



MANFRED TELLS SISTER MARGUERITE OF THE PICTURE.—p. 145.

Honour without Renown

By Mrs. INNES-BROWNE

*Author of "Three Daughters
of the United Kingdom."*

A New Edition

With a Frontispiece by L. D. SYMINGTON

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Preface.

HAVING been requested by many friends to give as promised, a "further glimpse" of "The Three Daughters of the United Kingdom," I have endeavoured to comply with the request in the following pages. It does us no harm, in these days of turmoil and incessant motion, of selfish hurry for fame and luxury, to pause now and again and realise that many of our fellow creatures of all ages, classes, and nations, have willingly cast aside these very gifts and possessions for which we so vainly strive and yearn, in order to devote their lives, their wealth, and talents to the relief and comfort of the poor and weak ones of the earth. Surely their lives stand out as an object lesson, the study of which acts upon us as a healthy stimulant, encouraging us to greater endurance and fortitude. It causes us also to ponder and search for the motive which prompted them to perform such generous deeds; making them hold as worthless all that we seem to prize so dearly, and to count, as treasure untold, the hidden blessings of the poor and destitute. Again, we may say what we will in praise of the advanced state of society, yet we cannot deny that there still lingers a sweet halo of restful refinement, a tender memory of unselfish motherly love, in our youthful recollections of the woman of the days gone by. And, true to life, I have endeavoured to depict the lives and characters of these "Three Daughters of the United Kingdom."

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CHAPTER I.

THE equinoctial gales were at their highest. Loud boisterous winds scoured the peaceful valleys, bent the treetops and whistled through their almost leafless branches, leaving broad visible tracks of ruthless destruction in their course. Then, as if angered at the sturdy resistance offered by the stately oaks and sheltered woods of Baron Court, the storm tore up the hillsides and swept along the lonely moors as though to revenge itself in noisy and exultant glee upon the sparse, tall pine trees which in thin and irregular ranks crowned the highest hills and broke the otherwise monotonous line of the horizon. Yet the force of the gale served but as pastime and sport for those old veteran firs; they merely bowed their dark green heads stiffly to the fury of the storm as it swept madly past, then rose again to their height, seeming to draw in with thirsty pleasure the sheets of pelting rain which dashed and beat with fury against their hard brown stems.

“Heaven help the poor sailors this night!” muttered old John Ryder, the coachman, as he tottered and struggled down a slippery lane. “Aye me,”

he sighed softly to himself, as he paused and drew forth a large red handkerchief wherewith to wipe the dripping raindrops from his fine old ruddy face—"aye me, it was just such a wild and woeful night as this when our bonnie Jack was lost at sea. The poor old woman has never looked up rightly since. Well, well! me own time may not be so far off neither, or why should a gale like this fash me so?" He paused once more to regain his breath; but from old custom—grown a habit—strained his eyes and ears to watch and listen, if perchance through the roar of the storm he might detect the sound of poacher's step or voice. It was with feelings of joy, almost of gratitude, that he descried at last the bright glimmer of a light which every now and then shone through the leafless branches and marked the spot where stood the quiet Western Lodge, the very one where some twelve years before dear old Father Egbert had alighted when bound on his mission of love and kindness to the young mistress of the Court. Slowly but surely the welcome light grew nearer and nearer, until at last the weary old man stood upon the gravelled walk and clutched for support the iron rails which enclosed the neat little garden surrounding the lodge.

"'Tis late, I know, but she'll admit me for a wee bit rest and shelter I doubt not," he thought; "and somehow I cannot stand the storm to-night."

A louder blast of the tempest than ever interrupted his cogitations, and howling madly around the eaves of the house shook the latticed windows, whilst it pressed the form of the old man roughly

against the railings. This decided him ; and as soon as the gust had somewhat abated, he opened with difficulty the low iron gate, and trudging up the short pathway, knocked loudly with the butt end of his gun at the door of the lodge. A light step moved within, and as the outer door was opened timidly, a flood of welcome warmth and light burst upon the boisterous air—without, however, revealing the figure of the old man as he stood wearied and wet outside.

“ Who knocks? Who is out on such a night as this?” asked a sweet but timid voice.

“ Me, Mrs. MacDermot! me—Ryder. Can you give me shelter for an hour or so from the rain? I do be somewhat fairly done this night.”

“ Of course I can. Come in quickly, and let me close the door, or the fire will smoke and all my work will be ruined. Poor old man! how drenched and cold you look! Surely,” she continued, kindly but reproachfully, “ there can be no necessity for an old man like you to be out in such a tempest, and with a gun too! Have you turned burglar or keeper?”

“ No, no, ma’am, neither,” he answered cheerfully, still shaking the wet from his coat like a huge mastiff, and meanwhile wiping the clay from his strong boots on the mat in the little passage outside; “ but”—confidentially—“ Jameson do be getting old, ye see, and weather like this tries him sorely; so I volunteered to take his place to-night.”

“ Oh, yes, I see it all, Ryder: you being so young can afford to risk your health for your friend Jameson. But, seriously, do be more careful

4 Honour without Renown.

of yourself. What would your master say if he knew you were out in weather like this?"

"Oh, nothing much. Maybe his little lady might scold a bit; but he is fond of sport, and he knows that it is on just such nights as these that the poachers be out, and the young hands be not up to their tricks like me."

"Granted, Ryder; but I often think that you are too kind, and should not work for every one as you do."

"Nay, nay, ma'am. You at least should not speak like that, for who works so early or so late as you do?"

A deep flush dyed the face of Mrs. MacDermot as she turned away in silence; and a heavy sigh escaped her as she resumed her work of ironing, interrupted by the sudden entrance of her unexpected guest.

She was a strange woman, this inhabitant of the Western Lodge; and the villagers loved to talk amongst themselves of her quiet doings and the dark mystery which seemed to envelop her life. The old porter, who had lived there for so many years, was dead, and suddenly—as if dropping from the skies—came the new lodge-keeper, recommended, report did say, by Lady O'Hagan. How the village people came to recognise Mrs. MacDermot as a lady, and involuntarily spoke of and addressed her as such, was more than they could explain. Nevertheless they did so; yet was her employment no higher or better than their own. "She only took in washing," they argued. True, it was not the coarse, heavy clothes, such as

passed through their own hands, that found their way to her lodge, but all the lighter, daintier articles from the Court, as well as from the houses of the gentry around : costly laces, altar linen, rich needlework, dainty ladies' garments, and pretty children's clothes—such things as these all found their way to her clever hands. “She gets the lick of everything,” ejaculated the spiteful ones ; “and if she does turn her things out to look almost as fresh and pretty as when first they left the maker's hands, why no doubt, in spite of her airs, she was reared to the trade—and then she's got nothing else to do.” True, this was how she earned her money, “and a tidy hoard she must have of it somewhere” ; but the question that exercised their minds so terribly was, what did she do with it? They knew her to be in great favour with their Lord and his Lady, the Earl and Countess de Woodville, for both had expressed their desire that Mrs. MacDermot might not be disturbed nor unduly intruded upon in her seclusion ; indeed, “they had heard—more than once, too—that the little Countess Marie, when at home, even looked over and paid the washing bills herself at the Western Lodge,” and *she*, they knew, was not likely to be stingy in her payments. Then followed the tiresome question, upon what did this strange woman spend her earnings? Truly, not upon herself ; for her gowns, to their knowledge, were but two in number, and those of a plain black material, and her appearance belied the idea of one who lived or thrived upon dainty fare. Then for what was she saving or hoarding her hard

6 Honour without Renown.

earnings? Ah, the correct and reliable solution to that question would have secured a high premium, had the owner cared to offer it for auction to the highest bidder at Oakhome. Neither were there wanting spiteful and jealous tongues which hinted broadly that Mrs. MacDermot had seen better days; that, likely enough, she had committed some terrible crime and was in hiding. Certainly, there was some deep, dark mystery which enshrouded and covered with shame her former life; they could tell that by her quiet and downcast look, and the tiresome way in which she frequently sought to evade or avoid altogether their very plain and straightforward questions. Well, well! whatever it was, they could afford to wait and watch; "murder will out," and doubtless the terrible truth would burst upon them some day, rewarding with tenfold interest their long forbearance.

Had they but watched her more closely when bowed in prayer, they could not have failed to observe the look of deep faith, and courageous hope, which lit up the dark brown eyes and gave to her quiet features that expression of brave, almost willing, endurance which surely could not be the companion of guilt. There were many others, however, who, like old Ryder, shook their heads gravely, saying: "Nay, nay! She may be a bit touched in her head with the melancholy, but she has done no wrong."

Of medium height, her figure slight almost to very thinness, her movements slow almost to weariness, Mrs. MacDermot's appearance varied so considerably at times that her age had frequently

been guessed at anything between four-and-twenty and thirty-five. Her brown hair was dark, and grew prettily from her forehead, from which it was simply and naturally turned, then twisted in luxuriant coils in the nape of her neck. Two soft large eyes, matching in colour the rich brown hair, shone out from the thin delicate face, revealing in their depths a settled look of ever-present sorrow ; but the sadness of their expression was in a measure counterbalanced by the signs of reserve and proud endurance that lingered around the delicate lips. A thick gold wedding-ring hung loosely upon the third finger of her left hand ; it would never have retained its position there at all but for the aid of a friendly keeper.

The kitchen into which Ryder had intruded was large and airy, and possessed an air of cleanliness and refinement. Across the further end of the ceiling were suspended several rows of deal laths, and upon them hung a various assortment of tiny garments, which in their spotless whiteness and exquisite finish seemed well to repay the laundress for the labour she had expended upon them. A large fire-place—one-half of it fitted as a stove for heating irons—shone conspicuously at one end of the apartment, whilst an oilcloth of a bright, cheerful design covered the floor. One low rocking chair, in which the weary mistress oftentimes rested her aching limbs, the arm-chair in which Ryder sat, and three smaller ones, together with a round centre table and dresser, constituted the chief articles of furniture, while a long narrow bracket table ran nearly the full

8 Honour without Renown.

length of the wall on one side and served as a stand whereupon to iron.

Outside, the storm appeared to rage with unabated fury ; but the eyes of old Ryder followed the graceful movements of his hostess with admiration. Others might speak of her as cold and reserved ; to him she had always been kindness itself. Perhaps she admired unduly the coachman's imposing presence and handsome jovial face set in its frame of silvery hair—for Ryder was no mean specimen of his class, and, taken as a whole, they are a decidedly fine set of men—or it may have been that she admired more the kind and manly heart within him, that, having suffered itself, yet was ever ready to help and cheer a weaker brother. Moving gently, as was her wont, Mrs. MacDermot raised a bright brass kettle which was steaming fussily upon the stove ; deftly she brewed and mixed a refreshing cup of tea, into which she poured a table-spoonful of brandy. Then she bent kindly towards the old man and bade him drink it.

“Take it now, poor Ryder, and never expose yourself so recklessly to the elements again ; more than your good master and mistress would miss your kindly face if you died and left us.” Then, as if to herself, “God help the poor wanderer and the homeless this night !” and clasping her hands, “Aye, more than all, may He guard those who are so safely housed that the storm will beat unheard and unheeded above and around their walls this night.”

He noted the impassioned action and caught the

burning accent of her words, as with a trembling hand he took the proffered cup and prepared to obey her with the simplicity of a child. He had always been a good husband, and respected women, therefore he could not bear to see them suffer. Mrs. MacDermot watched her guest steadily for some minutes as he sipped his tea at slow intervals, first from the teaspoon and then in larger gulps from the cup itself; then turning away she resumed her work at the side table. Ryder watched her now in his turn. He had seen many real ladies in his day—titled ladies, ladies of quality and position; yet, save for his own dear master's wife and the two that had been linked to her so tenderly in the days gone by, there was not one for whom he had more heartfelt reverence than for the owner of the sweet, patient face before him. The heat from the iron had flushed her cheeks and caused the locks of dark brown hair to form tiny curls around the white, thin temples; her downcast eyes, shaded by the long lashes, were lowered earnestly upon her work, but the fragile figure drooped as if from fatigue which the busy fingers refused to yield to.

Presently the warm drink, together with the soothing heat from the fire, began to tell upon the old man, and a feeling of cosy drowsiness and peaceful comfort commenced to creep over him. His gaze became riveted more upon the glowing embers before him, and, as frequently happens in old age, his memory was apt to travel back to scenes in earlier days, and to conjure up forms and faces that had left a much more indelible

impression upon his mind than any present or passing event could now achieve. Suddenly he made a strong effort and roused himself, exclaiming :

“Such a day as we have had to be sure!—driving to meet every train. Mrs. Thomas will have her hands full, seeing to the comfort of all those guests. I wouldn’t be a housekeeper for something.”

“The Earl and Countess have not yet returned, then?” she asked eagerly.

“No, and the company will e’en have to get on as well as they can without him. A telegram said his Lady was none so well, and he wouldn’t travel home without her.”

“He is very fond of her?”

“Fond!” ejaculated the old man, almost ironically—“fond isn’t the word for it. He thinks that much about her that, if aught serious, ye understand, happened to her, why, I do believe he’d go clean off it. But then,” softly, “how kind and gentle she is? There’s not one of us she doesn’t think of, and, what’s more, she makes him think of us too. Bless you! it’s a pretty sight to see her wheedle and coax him to her own way of thinking; and all the time he’s so proud to give in to her and let her have her own way? She’s been the very making of him, she has! But we all said it from the first; we knew she was the very one for him.”

There was a pause. The listener had ceased her work; her hand still retained possession of the iron, but it rested idly in its stand; her eager face betrayed intense and increasing interest.

Presently, with a sigh, the old man turned once more to the fire ; and staring at the glowing embers continued in a low tone, as if to himself : “ Ah me ! how time and things do be fickle and change to be sure ! It seems to me but last week since I saw the three of ’em—as beautiful young creatures as ever drew breath—standing linked together in girlish love on the terrace walks, cracking their merry jokes and speaking to me as freely as if I were one of themselves ; and then to think that *she*, the pride of them all—our own Lady Beatrice—should fling all her wealth aside, and, forgetting her father’s home and all its comforts—nay, even her very *name*—go and devote her life to serve God’s poor. So they told us ! Bless me, when first I heard of it, how I took on ! Ye see her father was dead, and I had known and loved her from a very baby ; and I thought to myself, if I can only make bold, maybe she’ll listen to what old John has to say. So day by day I watched me chance to waylay her ; and much good I did when me opportunity did come ! ”

“ What did she do ? ”

“ Do ? ” he cried, almost testily—“ why, just what she always did do—twisted me round her thumb and got her own way, and everyone else’s also.”

“ Do tell me what she said.”

“ I will tell you a little of what she said and did, for I can never forget it. First she listened in her own kind way to all I had to say ; then taking one of my great rough hands between both her little soft ones, she argued with me so beautifully and so sweetly that, like an old fool, I was so completely

beaten on my own ground, all I could do was to sink upon the stump of a fallen tree and cry like a child. Then, bless her little heart—I can see her now, it was all so natural-like—she whipped out her own dainty little handkerchief, and while one little hand pressed kindly upon my shoulder, with the other she wiped the great tears from my face; and thanking and praising me as though I had been a dear friend instead of an old servant, she bade me cheer up, and be as true and faithful to her brother and his dear little wife as I had always been to her and her father, and ‘Oh, above all things, John,’ says she, ‘take care of and love my darling old Leo for me.’ That was her St. Bernard dog she meant. Her voice shook when she spoke that last sentence! I began to hope my words were beginning to tell on her. She did feel leaving us then after all! There was a little satisfaction in that anyhow!”

“But she became a Sister of Charity, did she not?”

“Of course she did! When did a De Woodville ever give in if she had made her mind up to do anything? But we didn’t blame her, just because *she* did it. Yet she was so beautiful she would have graced a throne! Even when I told her she would catch all manner of loathsome diseases from the poor and die, she did but clap her hands and laugh at me. ‘No such good luck, John,’ says she; ‘I’m far too strong and healthy to be so easily laid low. Never fear for me!’ she went on; ‘but should you ever in the years to come hear of your old mistress giving her life for another, then you must be very proud

of me and very pleased to hear it too!’ ‘But I shan’t be either,’ I answered rudely enough. Yet she wasn’t a bit vexed with me—only laughed again. Oh, how we all loved her!”

“And where is Sister Marguerite now—Lady Beatrice that was?”

“Oh, where there’s work to do, you may be sure! She was in London for a few years; but when this Franco-Prussian war broke out, of course *she* was drafted off at once to nurse the wounded. You depend on it they knew what they were about when they sent her. They knew she would do the work of two, and never think of herself.”

“I did not know she had left London. I am so sorry! Oh, I did wish to see her just once again.”

“Why, ma’am,” exclaimed Ryder, endeavouring to rouse himself once more, “I didn’t know that you had ever seen her at all!”

“Nevertheless, I have,” she answered, trying to speak carelessly, “though at the time I knew nothing of her former history.”

“Well, that’s passing strange,” he muttered.

“But, Ryder,” questioned Mrs. MacDermot once more, “there were three of them, you said. One was your former mistress, Lady Beatrice de Woodville, now Sister Marguerite; the second was Marie Blake, now Countess de Woodville: all were old school friends. Was the third one Miss Margaret FitzAllen, afterwards Lady O’Hagan?”

“Aye, aye! that was her, sure enough.”

“Tell me, had she not seen a great deal of trouble?”

14 Honour without Renown.

"Now, this beats all," thought the old man; "folks do say that this lady never speaks, and never asks no questions. Why, she's as curious as the rest of her sex; beats my old woman, for she does know when I'm sleepy and when to stop." So he paused before he answered: "Yes, ma'am; folks did say she had seen a great deal of trouble, and I do believe she had, for she had buried all that were near and dear to her."

"But she inherited money and married happily, did she not?" again queried the hostess.

"She did, she did; and mighty glad we all were when her good luck overtook her. She was a right down bonnie Scotch lassie—that she was." The latter part of this sentence was uttered slowly and was barely audible, whilst Ryder's head began to nod perceptibly. Leaning forward, Mrs. MacDermot ventured yet another question, asking in a louder tone than before:

"Lady O'Hagan lives with her husband and family in Ireland now, does she not?"

"Either Ireland or Jericho—I'm not sure which," mumbled the old man in reply. Mrs. MacDermot looked very young as she smiled playfully, saying to herself, "Sleep in peace, poor old man, I will not disturb you more. But how I love to hear of those three dear souls."

She now turned energetically to her work, as though to make up and atone for the time lost in gossiping. The rain had apparently ceased, though the wind was still blowing a gale, such a one as frequently visits our shores about the end of autumn, denuding our favourite forest trees of their

last vestige of summer foliage, and not unfrequently tearing up ruthlessly and cruelly levelling to the ground the tallest and proudest of our greenwood monarchs. Inside the kitchen all looked cosy and comfortable. The regular breathing of the old coachman became mixed up with the solemn tick-tick of the clock, and the constant bang of the iron as it fell upon its stand. There was a pause now, as the busy toiler dropped her iron more gently than usual into its resting-place, and looking up with a startled, timid gaze, caught her breath in short gasps expressive of fear. Her nerves had suffered undue tension for the past few years and she was easily frightened now. From the outer door strange rough sounds proceeded as though an intruder were determined to force an entrance.

“John!—John!—John Ryder!” cried she, hurriedly shaking his arm. “Awake up! there are strange noises outside. Perhaps one of the deer has wandered into the garden and lost itself. Help me, there’s a good man! I am too much afraid to go to the door myself.”

“Eh! what’s that?” he asked, starting suddenly and rubbing his head in a puzzled, dazed sort of manner.

“Listen, and you will hear for yourself; some one is roughly trying the door.” He arose, and drawing his big frame to its full height, he too paused and listened. But a smile broke over his cheery countenance as, striding rapidly to the door, he said: “All right, ma’am! There’s no cause for fear. I warrant me I’ll strangle the

burglar single-handed." She watched him open the door boldly, and saw a great rough dog with one bound spring upon him, whining joyfully, with its two great paws upon his very shoulders, while Ryder clasped it round the body and looked fondly down upon its face. "Good old Leo! Dear old boy! Did ye hear the old man was lost?" he said, stroking the fine head affectionately. "No, no; he's here safe and sound. Ye have unearthed him at last, ye see. The old dog is pretty wet, ma'am, and in no fit state to intrude among your work. What shall I do with him, do ye think?"

"Bring him in by all means," she said, advancing to meet him. Then, stooping down, she took the dog's head in both her hands, saying softly: "Dear old Leo! Where is Lady Beatrice?" She repeated the name several times slowly and distinctly. The old dog raised one huge foot and placed it gently upon her, looking entreatingly into her face the while, as though he understood full well the purport of her inquiry. Then slowly withdrawing himself from her embrace, he walked with dignity towards the old coachman and settled himself comfortably at his feet.

"Now I thank ye much for the shelter and all your kindness, ma'am; but it's finer now and I must be moving. Leo will lead me safely back to me old woman. No doubt she's worried about me, and I shall likely catch it," he chuckled.

"She will be glad to find that you sought shelter from the worst of the storm. But, Ryder, will you do a kind action for me to-morrow, please?"

"That I will, right gladly, ma'am."

“About noon I must leave the lodge for an hour or two. Could you make it convenient to be anywhere near, in case any carriage chanced to pass this way? They rarely do; still I should not like to leave the place altogether unattended.”

“I’ll be about the premises if I’m living, ma’am, and see that all’s quiet during your absence. I know well you’ve no taste for prying folks about.”

“Thanks so much, Ryder; there is no one whom I can ask to look after my little belongings but you. Women are kind, but they are so curious. By the way, I will leave the key in the door and shall start punctually at twelve o’clock.”

“You may rely upon my being hereabouts by that time, then. Good-night, ma’am.” And bowing courteously, the old man and his dog trudged out into the night.

CHAPTER II.

THE following day, precisely at noon, the slight figure of Mrs. MacDermot, neatly robed in black, emerged slowly from the door of her lodge, and for some moments stood gazing in a wistful and hesitating manner, as though searching for some one, up and down the several footpaths leading across the park. Upon one of them, leisurely mounting a rise, appeared the familiar form of the old coachman. Recognising Mrs. MacDermot, he raised his stick and waved it briskly in the air, as though to remind her that she need have no misgivings; for, according to promise, he would guard her premises during her absence. This signal she acknowledged by a graceful wave of the hand, ere she disappeared quickly down the avenue of leafless chestnuts.

The storm had lulled; the wind had altogether dropped; but there had been several heavy showers during the forenoon, thus keeping the large house party of impatient sportsmen prisoners indoors; and Ryder knew that some of them had ordered an early lunch, being determined to face the elements and try the woods for pheasants, or even for stray woodcocks that very afternoon. Sir Hugh Lonsdale, a second cousin of Earl de Woodville's, was

representing the host during the Earl's enforced absence; and as Ryder sat resting himself upon the stump of a fallen tree he could distinctly hear the frequent crack of the sportsmen's guns which betokened that game was plentiful.

He had been seated, smoking quietly the pipe of peace, for the greater part of an hour, when his attention was attracted by the appearance of an immense dark cloud which was gradually but surely working its way directly over him. At the same time the report of the guns sounded each moment nearer and nearer. "I'm in for a ducking, and so are they," he thought as, rising, he felt the first few drops of heavy rain and recognised Sir Hugh and four of his party emerging from the shelter of the trees and coming towards the lodge.

"Hello, Ryder!" called that gentleman, accosting the old coachman in friendly tones; "I would rather be in the middle of a bleak fifty-acre field than remain under those trees if there is thunder about! Is there any place where we can obtain shelter until that ominous cloud is safely over?"

"I don't think there's thunder in it, sir," returned Ryder, touching his hat, "and the keeper of the lodge is out at present."

"Dear me, how unfortunate! I should not care so much for myself, but my friend here"—pointing to one of the group of gentlemen standing near—my friend, Mr. Manfred, is unnaturally afraid of thunder and lightning, and really we must find shelter somewhere, for five minutes more of this will soak us to the skin."

Without more ado Mr. Manfred, the gentleman already alluded to—a man of moderate height, whose appearance might have been pleasing but for the look of crafty suspicion which was never long absent from his features—stepped from the party and, brushing past Ryder, walked hastily up the small garden path, exclaiming almost immediately: “It’s all right, Hugh, the key is in the door. Come along!” And without waiting or hesitating an instant, he turned it, opened the door and sprang inside the passage leading to Mrs. MacDermot’s cosy kitchen.

“Confound his impudence!” muttered Ryder, as he turned and trudged briskly after the intruder. “Who is he, I’d like to know, that he forces an entrance into other folks’ houses without let or leave?” The rain was pouring now with a vengeance, and the gentlemen, led by Sir Hugh, followed rapidly upon the heels of their companion and Ryder.

“Well, I suppose there’s nothing for it; so I must do the honours in Mrs. MacDermot’s absence,” thought the old coachman.

“Come in, Sir Hugh! Come in, gentlemen. There’s a fire in the kitchen, and if the chairs be short, I’ll bring ye more.”

“Not at all,” answered Sir Hugh cordially; “those who wish to rest may do so; I and the others will watch the rain from the door, where we can enjoy our pipes in peace, and not fill this very cleanly little abode with tobacco smoke.” He had observed the look of annoyance on Ryder’s face when his friend Manfred had so unceremoniously entered the lodge; besides which,

he seemed to recollect having heard his cousin, the Countess Marie, speak with great feeling and respect of some one or other who dwelt at this particular lodge. Beckoning to his friends, therefore, he remained standing near the door; and Ryder thoughtfully supplied them with chairs, whilst they charged their pipes or lit their cigars.

It took the coachman some little time to supply the wants of the gentlemen, to dry the stocks of their guns and to answer their various sallies of wit and humour; and so occupied was he that, for the time being, he entirely forgot that Mr. Manfred was left to his own devices in the kitchen. That gentleman, having leasurably lit his cigar and duly admired the taste and cleanliness of his surroundings, set himself, as was his custom, to investigate things more closely.

Rising from his seat he sauntered round the kitchen, scrutinising everything with an air of lordly approval and mentally observing, "Ah, I recognise the effect of a cleanly and orderly old housewife here: it's a pleasure to see things so decently kept." Then, noticing a door at the further end of the apartment, he crossed over towards it and opened it gently. But he hesitated ere he advanced any further. There was no more definite purpose in his mind as to wherefore he should proceed any further, as he stood there with the open door in his hand, than that unaccountable feeling of danger to himself and suspicious desire to see to the bottom of everything which gave to his eyes their distrustful, almost hunted look. On the other side was a passage, a continuation

of the one by which they had entered ; but though Mr. Manfred heard the laughter and jokes emanating from his friends by the door, he was effectually hidden from their view by a sharp angle of the wall. Urged by an indefinable feeling of curiosity he stepped across the passage and turned the key and the handle of the door which stood opposite the one he had just passed through.

The apartment into which he now entered was a small but neatly furnished sitting-room. A chair and footstool were drawn near the table, upon which stood a work-basket ; an article of sewing lay carelessly beside it, a thimble and pair of scissors rested near. Upon the wall hung two oil-paintings, representing Scottish scenes of rippling lochs and misty heath-clad mountains, whilst at the foot of one of them nestled a small cottage of more than ordinary design and beauty.

Mr. Manfred snatched the cigar from his lips and frowned fiercely as he fixed a piercing gaze upon the pictures. A sudden spasm of pain appeared to seize him, for his hands shook and his breathing became short and difficult. It seemed to his excited brain that he could recognise the style and hand of the painter here, and in vain he assured himself that they were but fancy pictures and concerned him not.

Stifling with difficulty a mysterious sensation of alarm, he was turning to quit the room when his attention was attracted by a curtained recess, which had previously escaped his notice. With a few rapid strides he reached the tiny alcove and roughly drew the curtains aside. They disclosed a

small space exquisitely fitted up as an oratory. But he noted not any of the pious surroundings, nor yet a beautiful violin which reclined carelessly against the wall; his distracted gaze was riveted upon a portrait of a handsome young man—not altogether unlike what he might once have been—which hung a little below the crucifix. With a stifled exclamation of horror, Harold Manfred dropped the curtains and nearly fell to the floor. His knees shook, and the perspiration started from his skin. Still he glared with a wild fascination at the picture, whilst the gentle eyes of him in the portrait met those of the intruder with a frank, steady gaze that seemed to scorch with shame the very soul within him.

Summoning all his strength, he drew the curtains together and staggered to the door, not forgetting, however, to pick up the remains of the cigar which in his agitation he had dropped.

He had but just gained the kitchen when Ryder re-entered it by the other door. The old man's hearing was still acute, and he detected even the slight noise made by the cautious closing of the parlour door.

"Well, sir," he questioned, in a tone of voice which from any other man in his position would have been termed impertinent, "and how have you been occupying of yourself the last ten minutes?"

"I—I—am not well, Ryder," returned Mr. Manfred, sinking into a chair. "I have been seized with one of my bad turns—weak heart, you know."

"And did you think for to strengthen it by

prowling about another person's house, sir?" Ryder felt convinced that the man before him had intruded into Mrs. MacDermot's private apartments.

"No, no! What do you mean? I tell you I felt ill and went in search of water."

"Oh, well, if that's all, sir," answered Ryder, somewhat mollified, "I'll soon get ye that; for, Heaven knows, you look bad enough. Quite scared like," he muttered to himself, as he trudged off in quest of the water.

"I am, indeed, feeling bad. Get me the water and let me be gone at once!" He rose as he spoke, for the dread of meeting the inhabitant of the lodge gave renewed strength to his limbs; and he longed to be out in the free air once more, far from that strange house and all it might contain.

When Ryder returned with a glass of water Mr. Manfred had already passed the group of gentlemen and was standing in the garden path, scanning, with a wild light in his eyes, the road leading to the lodge.

"Why, Manfred," exclaimed Sir Hugh, with some concern, "how ill you look. Come back, do! The rain has not yet ceased."

"I have had one of my bad heart attacks, and when they seize me I must have air at any cost. Thanks," he continued, handing the empty glass to Ryder, "I shall soon be all right; don't trouble about me. I will stroll quietly back to the Court under the shelter of the trees; since there is no lightning to fear, I do not mind the rain."

"Where did you pick up Manfred?" inquired

one of the gentlemen. "He seems to be a strange sort of fish! See how scared he was about the lightning; and, I declare, he looks even more terrified now. What a nervous fellow he must be."

"You think so because you don't know him," answered the kind-hearted baronet. "I tell you that at times of real danger Manfred is reckless—doesn't know the meaning of fear. The fact is I met the man abroad, where he did a kind action for me; he is only young, though at times he does look so haggard and careworn; so, in return for his kindness, I have taken him about with me a little. Of course, I knew that my cousin wouldn't mind an extra guest, and Manfred is a good shot. He comes of an old North Country family—has an estate in Yorkshire, I believe; though, for some private reason, he seldom resides there."

"Doubtless the old tale: house occupied by the family ghost," observed another gentleman.

"Well, Lonsdale," laughed a military-looking man, good humouredly, "he is your friend, and in consequence we will be merciful. Only *I* shouldn't care to command a regiment of his calibre."

"Under fire he wouldn't turn out so badly as you think, take my word for it," said the baronet warmly.

They had left the lodge now and were sauntering slowly down a footpath towards the gamekeepers and beaters, who, having relieved themselves of their various burdens, came out to meet them.

"Can he," asked the military man aside to the gentleman who had last spoken—"Can he be the Manfred of Abbey Towers, do you think?"

26 Honour without Renown.

"Possibly," returned his friend, with an expressive look and a meaning shrug of his shoulders.

No sooner had the visitors departed than Ryder returned to the lodge, and endeavoured to replace the chairs and generally to restore order. He felt constrained to examine the parlour just to see if Mr. Manfred had really entered it, and whether he had left any trace of his intrusion. No sooner had he opened the door than the odour of a cigar was wafted towards him. "Seeking for water, were you, me fine gentleman!" he said aloud. "Oh dear, dear! but this is bad, and me left in charge too! I'm blessed if he hasn't dropped a lot of cigar ash here!" he exclaimed. "My eyes! I must clean it up quick or it will put the poor lady in a strange fright. The man must be more fool than knave," he muttered, as seizing the shovel he stooped down, and with the aid of his red pocket-handkerchief swept the ash on to it. This done, he carried and deposited it in the kitchen fire; and having given one last look to assure himself that all was safe, closed and locked the door as before and returned to the kitchen.

"No need to frighten her, poor thing; and as far as I can see, the man's done no great harm. Maybe I'd best say nothing unless I'm asked; but I'll keep me eye on the gentleman, and if I see aught suspicious like, I'll give me master a hint—that's all." He waited until Mrs. MacDermot's return, when he quietly informed her how the gentlemen had been overtaken by the rain, and had sought shelter in her house. She looked a little disconcerted at first, but seemed to forget the

matter almost immediately in the assurance that all would be quite safe under Ryder's care.

Ryder was not called upon to act as spy upon Mr. Manfred, for at an early hour the next morning that gentleman bade adieu to Sir Hugh and his friends and left for town, alleging that it was imperative for him to see his medical adviser at once. "I'll drive him to the station meself, and see him safely off the premises," thought John Ryder, as he drove round to the big entrance. "Maybe I may find out something more about him too."

Mr. Manfred seated himself silently by the coachman's side in the dog-cart, not even returning his respectful salute.

"I hope you're feeling better to-day, sir," observed Ryder, casting a side look down at his companion as they drove away.

"Oh, yes, decidedly; but I don't think this place can suit me. It was oppressive yesterday."

"It's mostly considered healthy, sir; but when our minds is oppressed everything feels heavy and dull like around us."

Manfred turned a sharp upward glance at his companion, but the placid countenance of the old man seemed to beam with innocence.

"Not that way!" cried the gentleman, clutching suddenly at the reins; "I—I much prefer this side of the park: it is shorter, and we shall reach the station sooner."

"Oh, as you will, sir. I did but think that as the day was early and we had plenty of time, we might as well lengthen our drive by going by way

28 Honour without Renown.

of the Western Lodge." "He's soon learnt his bearings anyhow," mused the old man, "and him only here for a couple of days."

"Who lives at this lodge, Ryder? It must be a sweet little corner in the summer time."

"The head gardener and his family, sir."

"Ah! how much prettier it is than the other one—not so lonely, you know."

"That may be the reason why some folks prefer it, ye see, sir. We ain't all made alike."

The rest of the drive was conducted almost in silence, though each man longed to put a leading question to the other. It was with a sigh of relief that Ryder at last deposited his charge at the railway station. He hoped sincerely that the gentleman was not "going away with more than he brought." "We are well rid of him: I don't like him, and I don't trust him, that I don't," he repeated to himself as he jogged leisurely home.

Manfred booked for London and thence made for Paris. It was a strange place to choose, seeing that the city was every day being more and more straitly besieged. But Manfred was a strange man; he felt he needed change, excitement of some sort—the more dangerous, the better would it suit his present frame of mind. The old longing to do something desperate and great seized him—something that would raise him for ever in the eyes of his fellow-creatures, and stamp him as a man of unimpeachable honour and renowned courage. He had also been playing much of late—had plunged deeply and lost heavily; the knowledge of which ought to have been of vital import-

ance to him and detained him well outside the walls of a starving city. But desperate men do desperate deeds; or is it not, rather, that at times a Higher Power overtakes them and forces them hither or thither they know not why or wherefore?

CHAPTER III.

A MONTH later and it was Christmas time. Paris—that home of the gay and festive, of the frivolous, the high-minded, the saint and the sinner—wore a very different aspect now from what it had done some six or seven weeks before. Its light-hearted inhabitants were for once serious. No more was heard of that empty boasting of the speed wherewith the Prussians were to be crushed and dispersed, and how ignominiously they would retire, cringing like craven dogs, to the borders of their Fatherland. The theatres and places of amusement had long since been closed; even the cafés were no longer crowded until midnight, for the gas had long since given out, and the shops and streets were lit only by dim oil lamps. The churches were crowded, and ladies were seen clad only in dark and sombre attire, many of them devoting themselves to nursing the sick and wounded. The sortie made by General Trochu to Champigny had been productive of little good, but it had filled the hospitals to overflowing; and many a brave young Breton soldier lay breathing his last amidst want and cold far from his father's well-filled granaries. Previously, towards St. Denis, there had been severe fighting, and the troops in that quarter had had a hot time of it. Almost all the houses in that locality bore marks of the strife. Here and

there shells from the Prussian guns had stripped off the roofs, or left gaping holes in the walls, whilst the streets and gardens were strewn with débris, the defending troops having broken up the furniture and torn up the flooring of many a stately building for firewood.

One cold day, about Christmas time, down one of these desolate, cheerless streets came a young English Sister of Charity. Some few yards behind her trudged a middle-aged, motherly-looking peasant woman, who was following the Sister's steps in the capacity of bodyguard. They had not very much farther to go, nor had the Sister much to fear; for though the roughs of Belleville and Montmartre were known to collect in small numbers about this quarter and search amidst the ruins for plunder, still at that time scarce the worst amongst them would insult a Sister of Charity.

The wind was strong and piercing, and little Sister Marguerite shivered as she hid her hands further in her sleeves and walked more briskly forward. Her sweet face was pale, and its expression was serious. Meat was at famine prices, and like many another Sister Marguerite was feeling the want of good wholesome food. She was hungry. Was she thinking with regret of the wealth, or the boards of plenty in her old father's home, or of the bright Yuletide fires which even now glowed in its merry halls? No! no such thoughts as these filled her mind or caused that troubled look to linger on the kind young face. Once, just for an instant, her lips trembled with pity as her quick eye detected, in passing, the

32 Honour without Renown.

hungry half-starved form of a large dog, which slunk away at their approach, as though desirous of hiding from men. Then a sudden feeling of gratitude rose to her heart as she thought of the comfortable bed and board provided for her dear old Leo at home.

A faithful attendant on the sick and wounded after that terrible carnage at Sedan, she had followed them with her gentle ministry, even to the heart of the capital itself.

Her kind heart had been almost overwhelmed with the sorrow and suffering she had witnessed. It was in no half-hearted manner that she had given herself to God, and devoted herself to His cause. The poor, the sick, the suffering, were His ; and she tended and loved them with almost a mother's love ; for being His, were they not her special charge also ? Many a sick man and care-worn woman, many a dying youth and sorrowful maiden had gazed with reverent gratitude upon her face, had hung upon her words, and had poured into her ears their complaints, certain of imbibing from her courage and strength to shoulder their cross, or to lay down the burden of this life with calm and sweet resignation. It might be said that when she was near—

“Sad hearts forgot their sorrow, rough hearts grew soft and mild,

And weary little children turned in their sleep and smiled.”

Sister Marguerite was always cheerful. Does not Heaven deal ever thus with the generous giver, and fill the heart with a secret joy which none can take from them. Why, then, this present little

cloud upon her face? She had a troublesome case on hand, and she longed for help from abler hands. Under her special charge was a stubborn old French officer, who neither by word nor look could be prevailed upon even to acknowledge his God—much less to make his peace with Him ere it was too late.

“And he is dying,” thought little Sister Marguerite; “I know that there is no hope for him, my poor, brave old soldier! I must do something for him!” And in her old impulsive way she hastened her steps almost to a run; then she slackened her speed as a happy thought seemed to strike her. Her eyes brightened with a gleam of hope, and the old merry smile parted her lips, as she whispered joyfully to herself in her own native tongue: “But wherefore should I so fret and worry about my poor old patient? Have I not charged the dear inmates of old St. Benedict’s to beseech Heaven in behalf of all my suffering poor, and this old man in particular. Their prayers will obtain for him all the graces he needs. After all, is it not such as they who do the *real* work? Whilst I am tending the body they are pleading for the poor neglected soul; together we will checkmate him, and my poor old soldier, who has been so brave in battle, shall turn in penitence to his God ere he goes forth to meet Him as a judge.” A few steps more and they paused in front of a poorly-built cottage. Alone among its more pretentious neighbours it bore no trace of shell or bullet.

“Now, Sister, I shall leave you. But wait for me: I shall return in a few hours to escort you back.”

34 Honour without Renown.

"It is most kind of you, Minnette. Ma Sœur would have accompanied me, but there was so much to do at the hospital that I offered to come alone."

"It is a lonely walk for such as you, Sister ; and every day the discontent amongst the people increases. My husband hears much, and he tells me that he fears even the religious habit will not protect the wearers soon !"

"Well, Minnette," said Sister Marguerite cheerfully, "those who work for the good God need fear nothing ! It surely matters little whether we go to Him by the hand of a ruffian or by that of disease."

"But the poor cannot spare you yet, Sister. However, just listen to the noise old Mère Corbette is making upon the floor with her stick. I pity you sincerely, Sister, if she is in one of her fierce moods. Shall I remain with you?"

"Oh, no, thank you, kind Minnette. It is all my fault : I have annoyed her by standing talking to you. *Au revoir*"; and with a bright smile Sister Marguerite opened the cottage door, closing it quickly after her, in the face of the piercing wind. She advanced towards a small table which stood in the centre of the little kitchen, and depositing her bag of provisions upon it, turned kindly towards the figure of an old woman who, propped up with pillows, sat in a large old-fashioned chair near the fire.

"How are you to-day, Madame Corbette?" she asked.

"Much you care how I suffer, or whether I live

or die," responded the old woman savagely. "Here have I sat since early morning, having only once broken my fast, no one to bring me food or attend to any of my wants! Yet you can find time to stand and gossip outside my door while you know I am starving!"

"Nay, nay; do not be too hard upon me. I thought Jeanne would have been here as usual and given you your dinner. I am so sorry I could not come sooner," said Sister Marguerite soothingly, as she raised the old woman in her chair and endeavoured to make her more comfortable. "Why did not Jeanne come to-day?"

"Who said she didn't come?" inquired the old woman tartly. "She did come. But she said I was unreasonable, and flew into a passion and left me to do for myself; and my legs have been more painful than ever to-day." Sister Marguerite took out the contents of her bag and placed them upon the table: a bottle of light wine, one small pie—the meat of which was, perhaps purposely, disguised with strong seasoning—two eggs, a small bag of freshly ground coffee, two rolls of bread, and a small tablet of chocolate. Hurriedly pouring out some wine into a chipped cup which stood near, and breaking off a portion of the bread, Sister Marguerite took it to the old dame, saying sweetly:

"There, poor old mother; I am so sorry that you have suffered. Drink this, and I will make you some nice warm coffee before attending to your wounds."

"You'll have to make the fire up first, and there

36 Honour without Renown.

are no dry logs in. It's bad management when folks don't get the wood in overnight."

"But why did not old Pierre come last night to cut the wood as usual?"

"Why? How can I tell you why he suddenly threw down the saw in the garden at the back and fled. I suppose, like every one else, he has gone mad with fear of a few Prussian dogs. If I had but the use of my limbs once more, I would show some of these cowards how to go out and meet an enemy. Is not every house around save mine deserted?—and yet no Prussian shell has dared to touch it. We want the Reds to the fore; they know the meaning of courage!"

Sister Marguerite was now upon her knees, sweeping up the ashes and endeavouring to revive the dying embers. She was feeling tired, and a sensation of giddiness crept over her, caused by the stooping position, when the sharp voice of Mère Corbette again roused her.

"I should like to know where you were brought up!" she snarled impatiently. "Your mother ought to be ashamed of herself for not having taught you to clean up a fireside better than that. Why you are wasting all the best of the ash!"

"Am I really? I am grieved to be so stupid, but"—with a merry laugh—"you see my education was so dreadfully neglected; you must excuse me; and I will try to do my work better and be more careful in future."

"I hope you will," grunted the old woman, as she drank her wine and ate her bread greedily. "You don't look too old yet to learn; but Ma Soeur,

as you call her, informed me that you came from England ; and one cannot expect much from an Englishwoman."

With the aid of an old pair of bellows and some dry wood which she discovered hidden beneath the rubbish in another apartment, Sister Marguerite succeeded in making a glowing fire ; and having placed a kettle of water upon it, turned towards the irascible woman in order to dress her helpless limbs. In her legs were large ulcerated wounds, whilst similar ones had broken out in her neck and side. With infinite pity the Sister skilfully dressed and bound them, thinking in her sympathetic heart all the while : "Poor old soul, she has indeed cause for her anger and irritability. It is terrible to be afflicted like this."

The old woman was a well-known character. Her temper had driven all her friends from her ; and when the siege commenced no one could prevail upon her to leave her cottage. It was her own, she protested, and she would live and die in it in spite of Bismarck and all his Prussian rogues.

So gradually every house in the neighbourhood save this little cottage was vacated, and the Sisters of Charity were requested to visit her daily, as no one else could be depended upon to do so. Merry little Sister Marguerite was generally selected for the task, and she was wont to laugh as she related to the Sisters the amount of courage it sometimes needed to beard the lioness in her den.

Having poured out some coffee, and made the meal appear as tempting and appetising as possible, Sister Marguerite drew the table within easy reach

38 Honour without Renown.

of her patient, and said coaxingly : " Now enjoy your food. I will remain longer with you and assist you to your couch in case Jeanne should not come to-night."

" Had you not better go in search of wood, or how do you think the fire is to be kept in or relit in the morning?"

" Ah, yes, I had forgotten that. Where does Pierre generally find the logs."

" Outside, of course. Those who seek can generally find if they wish."

Sister Marguerite made no reply, but turned humbly to obey. Leaving the kitchen she went towards a low door which she knew led into the neglected back garden. The short December evening was closing in : a dark cloud obscuring the pale sun made it appear even later than it really was. Large snowflakes were gracefully falling ; the wind had suddenly ceased, and the leaden clouds threatened a heavy snowfall. The scene was one of utter desolation. The boundary line of the old garden wall was to be distinguished only by the heaps of ruined stones which lay around ; whilst tall roofless houses seemed to stare with vacant gaze through their shattered and paneless window-frames upon the scene of ruthless destruction below.

Sister Marguerite stumbled across the uneven ground, searching in vain for the logs of wood ; all that came to view were some old and frozen cabbage stalks, a scanty scrub or two, various pieces of iron, and several broken utensils which lay scattered around. At last, towards the centre of the

desolate garden, she descried a stout block of wood, and lying near it, partly hidden by the long weeds and rubbish, the trunk of a small tree, evidently the remainder of that from which old Pierre had cut the logs.

“And here is the saw,” smiled the nun, as she stooped to raise it, all wet and rusty as it was. She shook it playfully for a few seconds, then the hand which held it fell listlessly to her side, and for some moments she stood like a carved and beautiful statue, the only visible living thing in all that dreary waste. She was listening; and as she listened her thoughts wandered. For who can control the heart of man? His thoughts are as free as the wild winds of heaven, which search alike the most silent, hidden nooks in the ocean’s dreary waste, and the crowded alleys in our busiest cities. With what ease, too, he can recall to the vision of his mind loved forms of the past, and oblivious of time and passing events, can conjure up dear faces, hear once more sweet low-toned voices that for long years have lain hushed and silent in the tomb. Nay, he can almost feel the warm pressure of strong or tiny hands which once he called his own. Sister Margaret heeded not the pure snowflakes as they fell upon her white *cornette* and feathered her blue-grey habit. There she stood, in the centre of that scene of desolation, in an attitude of listening thoughtfulness.

Over away to the south she could distinctly hear the heavy report of the Prussian guns, answered by those from the French forts. “Alas,” she sighed, “poor Paris! how will it all end? Will you resist

until all your brave inhabitants starve or perish? Or will the discontent which smoulders in the hearts of so many of your children burst forth into flames, and destroy you with a destruction more cruel? Ah me! I fear things will be worse ere they end." Then amidst the confused sounds of war and devastation came the peaceful sound of a convent bell tolling the Vesper hour. "And this is Christmas Eve," thought the Sister. Then away once more flew her thoughts to that Christmas Eve, when her dear old friend, Marie Blake, had first visited her at Baron Court. She pondered in loving memory each word and act of the sweet Irish girl, as she strove so patiently to win back to God her own proud, stubborn heart. When she recalled to her mind how wilfully she had resisted all their efforts and striven to stifle the voice of God calling to her to resign herself to Him—when she remembered all this, the warm blood rose to her cheek and she humbly bowed her head, asking forgiveness for the weakness and faults of her girlhood. She thought, too, of dear old Madge, the brave Scotch girl; of the time when they all three were thoughtless schoolgirls together, of the heavy trials which Madge endured so patiently, and she blessed God for the peace and happiness which she now enjoyed. But the little bell had ceased, and the snow was falling even faster than before, when Sister Marguerite suddenly roused herself and collected her roving thoughts.

"Time is fleeting swiftly and I have not yet cut one single log. How do men saw wood?" she asked herself as, stooping, she raised one end of

the small trunk and looked at it seriously. Then she cast an anxious look at the large rusty saw.

"It is bitterly cold, too, and old Madame Corbette will die if she has no fire to-morrow," said the distracted Sister. "How can I manage to cut this wood? It is quite useless as it is, being so long." Then a thought struck her; for a tiny picture of the interior of the Holy House of Nazareth rose before her vision, wherein the Divine Infant was assisting His great foster-father in his workshop, whilst His Holy Mother sat near them silently watching, listening, and pondering.

"Now, dear old St. Joseph," said Sister Marguerite, playfully but reverently, "do please come to the assistance of your stupid little apprentice, and teach me a little of your trade. See, this is the way you had the wood in your picture." And raising the fallen trunk she drew it partly across the block until one end of it projected a little over the side; "then one of your knees was on the wood so, and your saw was buried half-way through the plank; but, however did you manage to get it there, I wonder? I have seen men in the woods at home working the saw up and down; it did seem so very easy; I will try it too."

Poor Sister! She did try, and for some time with little or no success; the saw sprang from its place, jaggng the other little hand which vainly endeavoured to steady her work. But she was determined. One more earnest petition to St. Joseph for help—for love of the Divine Infant who assisted him—a few more vigorous thrusts of the clumsy saw, then, lo, a soft spot was found and the saw

42 Honour without Renown.

was soon buried, even like that in the picture, deeply in the wood.

She was becoming an adept at the process now, and the saw was already half-way through a second time when she was compelled to pause. The unwonted exertion had brought a high colour to her cheek, and a troublesome fit of coughing interrupted her work. It was some time before she recovered sufficient strength to resume it.

For half an hour longer she worked and coughed, coughed and worked, until quite a little heap of logs rewarded her exertions. Then flushed and elated at her success, Sister Marguerite collected together her spoil, and placing it tenderly in her coarse apron, carried it in triumph into the cottage, and deposited it near the little stove to dry. For a wonder Madame Corbette abstained from abusing her for tarrying too long over her work. Perhaps she was touched by the delicate expression on the sweet young face; and a pang of remorse may have shot through her as she noticed the snow falling and listened to the hacking cough which so frequently shook the merry Sister's frame as she gently helped the old woman to her couch. Ere all her kind ministrations of charity were completed the honest peasant woman made her appearance and bade the Sister hurry. It was late, she said; the snow was falling heavily, and it was a dreary night outside.

In the stillness of that Christmas morn, before so many altars of God, in thousands of churches, knelt countless faithful souls, all united in one act, that of offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Surrounded by the community of Sisters, in the stillness of their Convent chapel situated in the very midst of that terror-stricken and beleaguered city, knelt this young nun. Her head was bowed low, her hands were tightly clasped together, and her beautiful eyes were closed. Gone was the weariness which had almost overpowered her during the day. She remembered no more the aching of her limbs, heeded not the throbbing of the temples, caused by overwork and want of food; even the troublesome cough had for the time being ceased, for the soul of Sister Marguerite was reaping her reward, it was absorbed in prayer. Time was fleeting, the time that of all was most precious to her, in which no duty was allowed to interrupt her close communing with God.

Without disorder, upon the keen vision of her mind arose those forms she loved so well. Her poor, her sick, her suffering ones—and they were of all nations, of all creeds—the dear home friends, the departed, for each and all she must offer special prayer. How distinctly she could see the dear old school friend, Marie, as at this very moment she was kneeling beside her husband, her pretty face buried in her hands, praying in the beautiful chapel at Baron Court. She could not feel her presence bodily, nor was it given to her to catch the exultant tones of that *Gloria* which she herself had sung on that memorable Christmas Eve so many years ago; but so well did she know and understand the heart and mind of Marie that she could almost catch the burning words of

44 Honour without Renown.

prayer as they fell from her lips : “ O God, bless, protect, and reward my darling Sister Marguerite.” What wonder then if warm responsive supplications streamed to Heaven from the heart of the nun.

Close beside her in heart, though bodily in the Emerald Isle, kneels that other loved one, Margaret O’Hagan—Madge. The clear eyes are raised in petition and trust, and the loved name of Sister Marguerite lingers upon her lips until her fearless eyes grow dim with tears. Into the heart of Lady O’Hagan there steals a dread lest some unknown evil should befall the dear companion of her youth. Is not little Sister Marguerite in the midst of terror and disorder ! Heaven shield and protect her.

Grouped more closely still around the altar kneel the dear inmates of St. Benedict’s—those guides and friends of their happy girlhood, whilst the earnest prayers and petitions of their old children seem gathered and collected by the virgin band, and, united with their own, to ascend to the throne of the Most High.

Her brother Percy, too, now a priest of God, she felt sure he was even at this very moment offering the Holy Sacrifice for her especially—his only little sister. Then what of her father ?—whom once she had almost dared to love too well ; and the poor repentant mother, whose death, though sad, had been so hopeful ? The chair of dear “ Aunty ” Blake, also, was vacant, and, following her faithfully in death as in life, “ Old Peter ” too had gone. But those loved ones were still within reach

of her prayerful aid, and from the depths of her heart arose the cry, ' *Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine : et lux perpetua luceat eis !* "

How swiftly the time had flown ! Silently the Sisters had risen from their knees, and had left the chapel. The lights upon the altar were all extinguished, leaving but the dim light of the sanctuary lamp, when Ma Sœur arose, and walking towards the still kneeling figure of Sister Marguerite, touched her gently, bidding her rise and go in search of the rest she so sorely needed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE tedious winter of 1870 was over. Proud Paris had drunk deeply of the cup of humiliation, but the dregs were still to follow. Surrounded by a powerful and persistent army, harassed by want and hunger, she had courageously held her own, presenting a bold front to her stern and dauntless foes. But the piteous cries for food from the mouths of her helpless ones had wrung the hearts of her generals, and gay Paris, bleeding and battered, had bent her proud knee and sued for a cessation of hostilities.

The strong March winds had blown more fiercely than usual, or the long-tried constitutions felt their piercing edge more keenly ; certain it was that the first gentle breeze of April was doubly welcome, for it wafted dreams of rest and peace to many worn and sickly hearts. Lucky birds that had survived the late season of terror and strife awoke to life and hope, and twittered joyously in the gardens of the Tuileries. Why should *they* mourn indeed? What was it to them if human blood had been shed profusely, the lives of brave men sacrificed

freely? They had no time to weep for foolish human beings, they must work to build their little nests, and, whilst so doing, fill their tiny throats and sing for very joy the praises of their Maker.

“ Sweet birds, that breathe the spirit of song,
And surround Heaven’s gate in melodious throng,
You remind us that we should raise
The voice of devotion and song and praise ;
There’s something about you that points on high,
Ye beautiful tenants of earth and sky.”

Little recked they, poor birdies, that ere the fresh green leaves had fully developed, shading with Providential care their little nests—ere their tender broods were capable of self-protection—great hungry tongues of fire, lit by the malice of men, would burst from the palatial buildings around, and destroy every green and beautiful thing within their reach. Who in those hours of wild frenzy and excitement would spare one thought for the beautiful songster or care one jot for the fallen sparrow? Only He to whom they warble and sing. His will alone, then, was their law, and with no thought for the morrow, they worked and sang so sweetly that the gardens were alive with their merry twitter.

And now, when Paris might once more have raised her head and breathed in peace, the fierce passions which had smouldered in the hearts of the most depraved of her children burst forth into flames, dealing indiscriminately death and destruction around.

It was surely bitter enough to lie bleeding at the feet of a foreign enemy ! But far more bitter was it to stagger and faint through pain caused by the

cruel sword-thrusts dealt by ungrateful children. Yet, to the honour of France be it recorded that, though wearied and heart-broken by all she had endured, she remained still dignified and determined ; with one accord the better part of her arose to revenge and punish these rebellious children. Thus we find her one bright day in the very early April of 1871 ringing with disorder and confusion.

So long as the siege continued and the gates of Paris were strictly closed, Harold Manfred had chafed at the enforced imprisonment, had paced the boulevards cursing fate and his ill-luck. But now that he could escape if he would, he still lingered, curious to see the end, and, if possible, earn for his name some renown or glory.

He had made no friends ; he had not even sought to do so ; and the few acquaintances whom he met were of a gambling type. His morose manner had kept the more sociable Frenchmen at arm's length, and the manner in which he had doled out his payments for the necessities of life had caused him to be looked upon with suspicion ; in no sense did he correspond with the ideal of an English milord. His object, after all, in remaining where he was was mainly to gain time, and for the present to be forgotten. His exchequer had run low—very low indeed. His estate was burdened with heavy charges, and without drawing upon his investments he had not the wherewithal to meet them. No, he would allow things to take their course. Fate, the love of adventure, an unconquerable craving for renown, had driven him thither ; he must make such means as he had go as far as

they would. He had left no address, and creditors were not likely to search for him in Paris. Had it not been for the ill-luck which had discovered to him the contents of that chamber in the lodge of Baron Court, he would have played his cards so wisely and so well that even now he could have been vegetating at that luxurious English home.

So he thought, as he strode moodily along the Rue de Paradis, past the prison St. Lazare, casting every now and then scornful glances upon the ill-conditioned and discontented-looking battalions of National Guards from Montmartre and Belleville, as they paced the streets gesticulating and boasting wildly of the cold-blooded manner in which they had despatched their luckless generals.

So far the Communists had refrained from deeds of outrage upon peaceable citizens, and it is a ground for congratulation to the inhabitants of Paris that the conquering army still lingered outside the town, prepared to enter it at once should the line of railway be cut. But how long the motley and disordered force could be kept under control, composed as it was, in a great measure, of Socialists, Democrats, and Freethinkers—enemies to religion, order, and morality—was growing a grave question. Already rumours were gaining credence that an immense body of troops was collecting at Versailles; and the Communists knew that to retain possession of Paris they must fight hard, and that the blow for liberty must be struck boldly and at once if they would ensure a permanent effect.

Utterly regardless of the taunting jeers and

significant grimaces of the mob, Harold Manfred stalked proudly on. He scorned foreigners, as in duty bound, and would neither trouble about their language nor conform to their manners. Was not every Englishman worth three foreigners? That at least was the creed in which he had been reared, and he longed to show some of these low rebels what a cool-headed Britisher could do in the moment of danger and doubt.

Now he moved to one side as two Sisters of Charity glided hurriedly by. Now, if there was one form of religious dress that Manfred loathed more than another—he disliked them all—it was the white *cornette* of a Sister of Charity. The sight of it never failed to recall to his mind how, on board a steamer crossing the Channel, he had been ignominiously and publicly snubbed on its account by a young and beautiful English girl. The Sisters moved quickly. One was apparently some years the senior of her companion; this was Sœur Angela, who being the Superioress was more generally known as “Ma Sœur.” Over her pleasant face there hung an expression of grave anxiety; and so engrossed was she in serious thought, that it was rarely she raised her head to note what was passing around. Not so the younger Sister, who, seeing that the stranger stepped aside to let them pass, and supposing it to be a movement of kindness and courtesy, raised her bright face, and recognised at a glance the presence of a fellow-countryman. But the glad light died from her eyes, and she drew herself together with dignity, as she met his look of disdain. Where on earth had she

seen that same ill-natured face before? Was there not something familiar too in the whole aspect and bearing of the man? She thought so; but this was no time in which to trouble herself about a passing likeness when so many weightier matters laid claim to all her strength and skill. So Sister Marguerite dismissed the subject from her mind, and sped cheerfully along on her errand of mercy. As for Harold Manfred, no sooner had he caught sight of the Sisters' faces than the expression of his own changed to one of astonishment. He stood and stared at their receding forms until a turn in the street hid them from view.

Surely he had seen that elder grave face before! And how like were the eyes of the younger Sister to those beautiful proud ones that once flashed so scornfully upon him as he stood upon the white deck of an English steamer! Wheeling hastily around, he resumed his walk at even a more rapid pace than before, and laughing satirically called himself a fool for endeavouring to trace a connection between the English girl of bitter yet glorious memory and a common Sister of Charity. The bare idea was monstrous! Nay it was desecration to the very memory of that girl, and he dismissed the thought indignantly.

He was now on the Boulevard Barbies, a continuation of which would lead him by way of the Boulevard Ormano to the Porte de Clignancourt. He felt a strange fascination in gazing upon the ruin outside the walls, and he would stroll in and out of the deserted houses and weave romances

out of the feelings and fortunes of their previous owners. Not far from the very place where he was making his lonely explorations stood the little cottage of old Mère Corbette, to which the Sisters were then directing their steps.

“You are very tired, Ma Sœur,” remarked Sister Marguerite, looking affectionately at the grave face and noting the languid step of her companion.

“Yes, I must own to that at least ! Never did I feel the distance so long or so wearisome before. I have made up my mind, now the last two soldiers have recovered, that unless Madame Corbette leaves her cottage and takes up her quarters at a more convenient distance from the Convent I cannot allow my overworked Sisters to attend upon her.” Sister Marguerite was silent for a few minutes, then remarked :

“But so far the cottage has proved of great utility. Several soldiers, who were too badly injured to be moved to any distance, would certainly have died unassisted by us had it not been for that convenient harbour of shelter. It is strange how useful the tiny house has been, and how bravely it has withstood the siege !”

“It has been comparatively sheltered from the fire of the enemies’ guns by the large buildings at the back. That will be so no longer if our own are levelled against it, as they inevitably will be unless this terrible rising is quickly subdued. And, more, the Sister who traverses these streets soon will have a dangerous task to perform ; and considering her arduous duties elsewhere, she ought not to be compelled to undertake it.”

Kind and motherly Sister Angela! Since the first day upon which you met that bright school-girl, Beatrice de Woodville, and she so nobly stood your champion—and that of the sick Sister whose journey across the Channel you were endeavouring to ease—your heart has yearned towards her with a strange love and admiration. Yet oft-times you tremble for her, knowing so well to what heights of self-sacrifice the heart of Sister Marguerite is capable of rising.

They had now reached the small wooden porch, and, springing lightly up the steep stone steps, Sister Marguerite thrice rapped briskly with the knocker upon the rickety door. The call was immediately answered by Jeanne, who, after great persuasion on the part of Ma Sœur, had consented to resume her night watches at the cottage. Perhaps the hope of inheriting the stocking of gold reported to be possessed by the old woman encouraged the niece in her charitable ministrations. Ma Sœur walked straight towards Madame Corbette, and, addressing her kindly, sank exhausted in a chair beside her. Now, if the old woman feared any one on earth it was Ma Sœur. She could not but feel that she owed her much; still, as she turned her hard, plain face, framed in its large white cap, and fixed her beady black eyes upon the nun, she did not forbear to remark in a sarcastic tone:

“Ah, it’s better, after all, to be able to walk, even if one should feel some slight fatigue, than to be aged, decrepit, and in constant pain, as I am.”

Ma Sœur looked at her, perhaps, a little sternly as she answered with quiet dignity: “Possibly so.

But look at little Sister Marguerite! See with what care she has brought you a more dainty repast than usual. It consists chiefly of her own share of a kindly gift which was yesterday presented to us for our own table."

"One is lucky to get a few crumbs now and again which fall from the table of a religious; it brings a flavour into one's mouth of better days," was the ungrateful reply; for a Red Republican to the backbone was old Mère Corbette. "However," she continued in a grumbling tone of voice, "I cannot eat until my wounds are dressed."

"And I am quite ready to attend to them now," said Sister Marguerite, kneeling down quietly and commencing to unwrap, with clever and tender care, some of the bandages which covered the unsightly sores in the infirm old limbs. It was a most revolting form of skin disease from which the old woman suffered—one which should have received special hospital treatment; but Madame Corbette had steadily refused to leave her cottage. And the Sisters had given a promise to her husband on his death-bed to continue, if possible, their care of his atheistic wife, and endeavour to win her back to God ere she died. Ma Sœur could not express a shudder of horror as she saw the gaping wounds exposed; and yet it was surmounted by a feeling of sublime admiration as she watched the sweet face and movements of Sister Marguerite.

It was lessons like the present that had subdued the proud heart of Beatrice de Woodville, and Ma Sœur was able to measure, in a small way, the

great grace that had been needed to change that spoiled and dainty girl into the humble nun before her. Yes, surely there was a soft place in her heart for Sister Marguerite.

But listen ! what was that ? Ah, their ears were too well practised to mistake the rumbling of cannon, followed as it was instantly by the sound of a shell which exploded not more than two hundred yards from the cottage, shivering to splinters the remnants of a shattered wall.

Signs of deadly strife had appeared outside. One small detachment of the National Guard, led by a brave young officer, refused to yield or join the ever-increasing mob of Communists which each moment threatened to overpower and destroy them. So they bravely manned the few guns remaining in their possession, and opened a destructive fire. But the advance of the Communists continued steadily, sheltered as it was by the half-fallen and deserted buildings.

This was sport in which Harold Manfred revelled. Born to be a soldier, the clash of arms had ever made his pulses thrill, the flash of sword and whiz of bullet fired him. He would not go out of his way to fight for France, neither would he turn and flee if danger threatened him ; but he would aid those around him and defend himself if need were, showing these curs how an Englishman could fight.

Eagerly he watched the strife ; and when opportunity offered, without one thought of fear, seized the rifle and ammunition of a wounded soldier and advanced with the mob. He would strike a blow

for liberty and France ! Several shells had fallen, but all had not exploded ; so far but little serious harm had been done. A small force, of which Manfred was one, had been thrown forward and was sheltering in a long, low building, the floor of which was thickly strewn with damp and well-trodden straw. Evidently the place had been occupied during the siege by cavalry ; for though the roof had given way in several places, and the large windows were long since denuded of every vestige of glass, the walls were yet strong and afforded good shelter for the time. Between this building and the next intervened some eighty yards of open ground, on which the men would be exposed to a deadly fire. An excited discussion was taking place as to the advisability of rushing it or of taking a more circuitous route, when straight through one of the open windows into their very midst hissed a shell. There was a stifled cry, followed by an instantaneous rush for safety ; but quick as thought Harold Manfred seized the deadly thing and dashed with it through an open doorway. Alas ! he tripped and fell ; the bomb exploded, and where was the gallant Englishman ?

Few had witnessed the act ; men still crouched and hid behind each other in dread of what was coming, when they were roused by the report of the explosion outside. But the keen eye of their leader had seen it all ; and his heart was stirred with admiration and pity, as he bade the men gather gently the mutilated body of the Englishman and carry him—where ? For a moment he

stood and gazed in bewilderment around, then the order came : "To yonder cottage, from the chimney of which issues the curling smoke."

Back again through the crowd of howling fanatics they bore their unconscious burden, whilst many an eye gazed upon him, recognising in the face of the sufferer the proud Englishman at whom they had jeered that day.

Poor Manfred ! you have paid dearly for the renown which you craved so much to earn—or has the day of reckoning overtaken you at last ?

CHAPTER V.

A MEDICAL man had staunched the blood and joined the small procession ere they reached the cottage door. Short and peremptory was the knock they gave; yet ere they halted Ma Soeur had recognised the rhythmic tramp of soldiers' feet, and knew that another case awaited them. Opening the door she gazed with pitying eyes upon the still handsome features of the Englishman. His face alone was exposed to view: the rest of his body had been mercifully covered.

"Sister Marguerite," she cried; "prepare and open at once the bed in the small back chamber."

But the shrill voice of Madame Corbette echoed loudly in their ears: "No, no, I say! Back with the wretch; he shall not enter here. Death, death, to each and all the troops, and all who fight against Liberty and Freedom. To no more of the false-hearted knaves will I give shelter or rest."

"Nay, shame on thee then, old Mère Corbette, for a hard-hearted fiend," spoke one of the men. "This man is no enemy of thine; he has fought gallantly, and has struck a blow in the cause thou lovest so well."

"His last blow," commented the doctor. "Come,

carry him in ! We have Citizen Barlet's orders to do so, and must obey,"

"You lie ! You are deceiving me," shrieked the woman as, forgetting in her excitement the pain and helplessness of her limbs, she dragged herself into a standing position and stood without support screaming and swearing that he should not enter there. "Where are his decorations?" she shrieked ; "where the glorious red that should mark him for a true patriot?"

"Behold," said the doctor, "the red dye where-with he is stained ; more than his heart's blood he could not give for France. Move on, my men, and heed her not. See, he sighs ! he breathes more freely ! Each minute now is worth an hour. Carry him forward quickly."

"I defy you ! You shall not do it !" now yelled the old fanatic. "If you bring him in here it is at your own peril. The house is mine, and it shall not shelter an aristocrat !" The covering had partly fallen, and exposed to view the dress of an English gentleman.

"Madame Corbette," said Ma Sœur, turning with dignity towards the wretched woman, and speaking sternly and with authority, while she forced her back into her chair, "be silent ! Cease once for all this disgraceful language and behaviour, or I shall leave you to your fate, and no Sister shall ever darken your doors again. You shall be left to die as you deserve, neglected and forgotten, if you dare to refuse shelter to this gentleman. The hospitals are full, and to carry him further would be to kill him. This very day did I come to tell

you, that unless, you left this house, and changed your quarters, we should attend your case no longer. Now refuse your roof to this stranger and instantly we discontinue our care of you. Do you understand me? I am not one to go back upon my word."

Madame Corbette, faint and exhausted by her physical exertions, sank heavily back into her chair. She had measured swords with Ma Sœur before to-day, and she knew who would come off victorious. So puckering her unpleasant face into an expression of black and sullen disapproval, she continued to mutter hoarsely in an incoherent and unpleasant manner.

Rapidly Sister Marguerite had spread the little bed. Narrow as it was, the sheets were spotlessly white, and a fragrant odour of lavender pervaded the tiny room. With the greatest care they raised the unconscious man and laid him gently upon the open bed. Then a sight met the Sister's eyes which well-nigh overcame her. The face, arms, and body of Manfred seemed little injured, but the whole of one leg appeared to be smashed to a jelly; cloth, flesh, and bone were mingled in an indistinguishable perplexity. As high as the knee the other leg too had suffered considerably; but that, perhaps, might be saved.

"And it is the poor sullen Englishman!" thought the kind-hearted nun, as she forced herself to overcome her nausea, and bending low examined closely the ghastly features. "My God, what a dreadful thing! Will he live, doctor?" she inquired eagerly.

“Not at all likely to, Sister. Few constitutions could survive such a shock.”

“Poor fellow, poor fellow!” she repeated to herself in English; “how sad to die all alone and so far away from home: surely some one will miss and mourn him! His papers, where are they? They must be saved and examined.”

“So you also are English, Sister. It is lucky for the unfortunate man; for in extreme cases like this, should men speak at all, it is almost certain to be in their own tongue. However, let us to work at once and seriously, for I am told that he met his death in the execution of a bold deed; and it shall not be said that France was slow or forgot to repay a generous act.”

“Bold, daring, and brave, of course he was; that goes without the saying! Was he not *English*?” thought Sister Marguerite; and a flash of patriotic pride lit up her face, as she remembered how unnumbered were the famous deeds of heroism recounted in history of her own dear countrymen.

Stooping once again she loosened yet more the clothing around the sufferer’s throat, feeling gently about his neck and chest in the hope of discovering some crucifix, scapular, or medal, which would entitle her to call to the sick man’s aid the kind old Abbé Marlière. But search as she would no object of piety or value could she discover, nor any clue to his identity. One waistcoat pocket contained two golden English coins, and a little change in silver; but that threw no light upon the man’s identity. His linen was fine, so likewise

was the cloth of his suit ; but they bore neither mark nor initials. Hat he had none ; doubtless it had fallen off in the fight.

Still under the effect of a strong opiate, Manfred groaned and breathed heavily. Once, as he sighed, his lips moved, as though he were endeavouring to frame a sentence, but Sister Marguerite only caught the word "water."

"There is no time to prolong the search further, Sisters ; you must go into it more fully afterwards. At present render me all the assistance in your power, for this is a terrible case." So saying, Dr. Arno speedily made his preparations, and with the help of the Sisters cleverly, if roughly, severed the mutilated limb and bound up the stump. The other leg was tended as best it could be, for the time being, in accordance with the medical man's present opinion.

It was from scenes such as these that the gay Beatrice de Woodville would have turned away in sickening disgust ; but Sister Marguerite braced herself to face and aid it to the utmost of her power. "For the love of Thee alone, my God, will I tend and nurse this poor stranger," she prayed ; "and if he must die, let him go to Thee with the full knowledge and trust in Thy love and mercy. Thou hast sent him somewhat strangely to my care ; give me strength and grace to aid him for Thee."

When the operation was over, the doctor could not but admire the silence, method, and dexterity with which the Sisters cleared away all trace of it. Being a kindly man, he even aided them in their

labours, feeling a great admiration and pity for the bright-faced English Sister, whose hacking cough was such a constant trial to her.

Soon the small room assumed a more cleanly, peaceful appearance. The balmy air, penetrating through the open casement window, pervaded the apartment, chasing away the former stuffy atmosphere, and fanning with grateful coolness the fevered cheek of the silent sufferer. All was still save for the heavy breathing of Manfred when Sister Marguerite resumed her search amongst his clothes. No letter or pocket-book was to be found; nothing that could convey the smallest clue as to the man's identity, or tell from whence he came or whither bound. It seemed as though the man had purposely left them all behind in order to perplex them. The handsome gold English lever watch, which Dr. Arno was even now examining, had once had a crest engraved upon the back of it, but rough usage had almost entirely defaced the tracing, and try as he would he was unable to decipher it.

"Ah, here is something," cried Sister Marguerite, holding up to view a beautiful mother-of-pearl cigarette-case, mounted with silver—"here in this corner are the letters H. M."

"Even they do not advance us very much," said the doctor, smiling. "Try again, Sister."

"Now I have found a gold match-box, Doctor; and here are the two letters again. But stay; there are three letters here: they are E. T. L., woven into a monogram. Upon the other side I find an almost effaced crest. There has been a

64 Honour without Renown.

coronet, I think ; but I cannot tell what else ; the motto is still readable. It is, '*Dum spiro spero.*' Poor man, that is very nice."

"I think the wisest thing to be done is to collect all these little valuables, and placing them somewhere in safety, to wait until the sick man recovers consciousness sufficiently to be able to tell us more of himself."

"You are right, Doctor," said Ma Sœur, as she assisted Sister Marguerite in folding whatever clothes were not so much damaged as to be utterly valueless ; and having placed them and the afore-said treasures carefully in a drawer, she continued : "Sister Marguerite must watch patiently for the first glimmering of consciousness, and after questioning the poor man cautiously, must note carefully his answers."

"Can either of you remain the night with him ?" inquired the doctor.

"No, it is against our rules to do so. But we know of a kind woman and her husband who would, no doubt, share the night work together. If they are unable to assist us, I may, perhaps, secure the aid of a Sister of Bon Secour : many of them understand English well," said Ma Sœur. "And Sister Marguerite shall be here early and late."

"I feel peculiarly interested in the man," said the doctor, as he stood eyeing his patient with kindly, critical eyes. "There is something about him which bespeaks him to be of gentle birth. These hands," he continued, taking up one of Manfred's listless ones from the coverlet, "never worked for their bread, Sister. Observe how soft

and delicate they are, yet how beautifully formed or strength and power. Poor Englishman ! It will be a terrible awakening for you ! Remain near him, Sister Marguerite, and watch carefully for the first sign of returning reason. In fact, do not leave him until I return, for I shall pass the night here. Besides, I understand a little English, which may be of service at present. Who knows," mused the doctor, "but that his friends may be wealthy ; they may also be most *grateful* for my care. Yes, I will certainly make it my business to tend him to the utmost of my ability. I only wish the man may live !"

CHAPTER VI.

ABOUT nine o'clock the following morning Harold Manfred opened his eyes and gazed vacantly around him. He felt as though there were but part of himself left—a heavy painful trunk which he was powerless to move. His head alone seemed real and alive ; but the horrible vision conveyed from his eyes to his brain rendered him terrified lest his mind should have given way.

At the foot of his bed, distinctly defined, was the white *cornette* of a Sister of Charity ; and closer to him—at each moment nearer to him—came another. He must be mad, and these were his keepers ! Then they multiplied themselves into twelve—fifty—nay, he could count them no longer. Above him, beneath him, around him on all sides were those hateful *cornettes* ! Was he dead ? and was this to be part of his everlasting punishment, inflicted for the hatred he had harboured towards them in life ? If so, what about the graver sins of his past ! He closed his eyes to shut out the horrible vision, and endeavoured to turn upon his side ; but to move his body caused him such intense pain that he dared not stir ; and with a groan of helplessness his head drooped wearily upon one side. And then a small, cool hand was placed upon his burning brow, and a delightful

beverage was held to his parched lips, whilst the accents of a sweet, low voice fell upon his ear.

“Drink this,” it said; “it will help you to get better. I am so sorry for you.”

Sorry for him!—any one on earth sorry for him! Why, where was he then? What was the matter with him? He dared not open his eyes, lest the horrid vision should once more overpower him. But the voice, oh, how passing sweet and kind it was, with its tones as tender as those of an angel! Whence did it proceed? Would it speak to him again? He would obey it and drink, for a parching thirst possessed his body, and the draught was grateful. Then once again the small hand stroked his head, as though gratified by the effort he had made.

“Where am I?” he ventured to ask in a whisper, still keeping his eyes tightly closed. “What is the matter with me?”

“You are quite safe at present. Through your own bravery you have been badly injured, but the good God has spared your life.”

“Then it is not all a dreadful dream. I am still alive! But I feel so strange—so ill!”

“If you are very good and quiet God may give you the strength you need; but you must not excite yourself one little bit. Is there any one whom you wish to see? Have you friends in Paris?”

“No, none!” was the curt rejoinder. And the kind questioner, fearing to tire her patient, turned to Ma Soeur with tears of gratitude glistening in her eyes.

68 Honour without Renown.

"I am so thankful that he has not passed away whilst in that state of unconsciousness," she whispered. "Now, if only he may have the grace of a holy, happy death, how joyful I shall be ! "

"Well, little Sister, you must pray hard and use all your influence. It is wonderful what strange cases God gives to your special care. What a glorious death was that of your poor stubborn old officer. Courage, dear Sister ; for, if I mistake not, you will have many grateful hearts awaiting you in Heaven,"

"And right sorely shall I need their aid, Ma Sœur," she replied gaily. "But it strikes me that this countryman of mine is somewhat like myself, and will require some planing and re-modelling ere he is fit to join the angelic host. I seem also to feel that he has a great aversion to *us*."

"He will overcome that when he has learnt to know you better Sister—never fear," replied Ma Sœur, as she crossed the cosy apartment occupied by Madame Corbette, and made for the outer door, accompanied by Sister Marguerite. "Since he seems better, and, I think, likely to rally, at least for a time, I shall leave you to tend him and the old woman ; but should you find the task greater than you can accomplish, send a messenger to acquaint me of the fact, and I will endeavour to send you aid at once. And, above all things, take as much rest yourself as you can ; for you look dreadfully tired and worn out."

"Thanks very much, Ma Sœur ; but I hope to be quite able to manage both patients ; and I am very strong, you know."

Ma Sœur stepped out into the open street alone, but there was a sad, wistful look upon her face when the door had closed, shutting from view the cheerful countenance of her younger companion. "I do hope," she said to herself, "that the walk or ride here in the open air will do dear Sister Marguerite good. She is looking so dreadfully worn and overworked, and her cough is terrible. I fear it is getting very serious, though she always makes so light of it. As soon as she can be spared, she must return to England to recruit."

The sun was shining brightly; there was a delicious freshness in the air; though all around looked desolate and neglected, yet here, at least for the time being, a calm seemed to prevail. Some of the 'buses had resumed their running; and a little farther down, where the houses had suffered comparatively little, Ma Sœur hoped to be able to hail one.

It was about three o'clock that same afternoon when Manfred awoke once more, with a sudden start, to consciousness.

"Where am I?" he demanded suddenly; but this time his voice was stronger.

Sister Marguerite had stationed herself near the window, at the head of the sick man's bed, where by an old curtain she was hidden from his view. Her patient was too ill to be worried by the sight of her at present. She must endeavour to ascertain whether he had a wife, a mother, or friends of any kind, who ought to be informed of his critical condition, ere it was too late. So she answered kindly :

“You are ill in bed, but safe from further danger of the war, and shall be well cared for.”

“What is the matter with me? Am I very ill? Why can I not raise my legs? And why do I feel as though I had been severed in half?”

“You have been severely wounded, poor man; but do not distress yourself; you may recover and get quite well again.”

“Surely I am in no danger of death?” he cried, raising his head. “Oh, not death just yet!” I must not die now! I want time—time!”

“Hush, hush!” came the sweet voice; and a strong little hand pushed him back upon the pillow. “Do not distress yourself, or you will certainly die. Be calm—be quiet—and you may yet live. Why should a brave and noble man fear death? You have been both, and God loves the brave!”

“Oh, Edmund, Edmund!” he cried, in tones of agony, “forgive me! I cannot—must not—die and leave you thus! I dare not face your God and mine.”

Sister Marguerite stepped from her hiding-place. This was no time in which to indulge a sick man’s whims: her duty was before her, and she must be at her post. Strange was the tone of power and solemnity that that gentle voice could assume in moments of difficulty or danger.

“Hush!” she repeated, laying her hand firmly upon his. “You must not speak like that. You will not die until time has been given you in which to repent. If you have in any way injured another there is still time to repair the wrong; and I know

you will act nobly, generously ; and God will reward infinitely for the difficult act of self-abasement."

"*I* repair the foul deed ! I cannot!"—and he laughed a bitter laugh. "It is too late now ; things have gone too far for me to face them. And who are you?" he cried, in angry excitement, "that *dare* to bid me do it?"

"I? I am but a servant of the good God ; yet ready, for the love of Him, to stand by you and aid you to the uttermost ; and I bid you be quiet ; Have confidence ! Trust Him, and all will be well." As she said this she stood revealed before him—a simple Sister of Charity.

He turned and looked at her for an instant, aversion and helpless misery depicted in his eyes ; then, covering his face with both hands, he groaned heavily and murmured : "Go away—go away ! Cease to torment me ! You do not know of what you are talking."

She drew a chair to the bedside, and, seating herself upon it, waited patiently until the paroxysm should be over. She had been bidden to tend and nurse this man, and to the best of her ability she would do so. Fearing lest his excited feelings might overcome him, she rose and prepared a soothing draught, and uncovering his face administered it to him. Then reseating herself, she took one of his hands in hers, and said : "Close your eyes, and tell me quietly, if you can, where your home is, that I may send for your friends."

He did not heed her question, nor yet did he seek to withdraw his hand from hers. He merely

murmured pettishly, "Oh, that such a voice should emanate from such a form."

There was a pause, during which Sister Marguerite continued to stroke soothingly the hand that still lingered within her grasp. Say what we will, and endeavour to explain it as we may, there is a strange magnetism, a strong power to control and comfort in the mere touch of some favoured few. The hard, horny palm, as well as the soft, delicate one, can convey alike that unspoken sympathy, often so grateful to the weary patient, that by its power alone actual pain is oft-times eased and new hope inspired to the sinking heart. Manfred's mind was becoming calmer each moment—until the Sister, in endeavouring to stifle her cough, relaxed her hold of his hand. Then the excitement seemed to return to him, and he enquired hurriedly :

"Tell me, if you can, what ails my limbs? Why can I not raise them?"

She did not immediately respond, hoping that the draught would presently take effect, and that after a thorough rest he would be better able to endure the shock. Endeavouring, therefore, to evade the question, she spoke in a soft, dreamy tone, so as not to fret him, upon a subject which she thought would help to obliterate the present from his mind.

"Perhaps," she said, "your dear mother is thinking fondly of you now."

"My mother? Alas! no. I have no parent living now."

"Your sister, then," she urged more softly—

“how sweetly and tenderly would she nurse you now.”

“She is where I shall never be,” he cried with more energy. “She died in all her youth and innocence.”

“But your brother—how his heart will beat with pride and joy when he hears of the gallant deed you have done! Is he near, that I may call him?”

Had a bomb fallen and exploded in the room it could scarcely have had a more startling effect upon her patient than had that last sentence of poor Sister Marguerite’s.

“My brother!” he cried, raising his head and rolling his eyes around, as though in terror lest some one unseen should be crouching near; and the veins on his neck and forehead stood out swollen and distended—“who dares to mock me? Who says that my brother would grieve for me—would be proud of *me*? Don’t you know that he could not come if he would—that his weary eyes have wept till they are dry and can weep no more? Oh, in mercy cease, and spare me! Breathe not his name or I die.”

With a vigorous push he threw the bed-clothes from him, and in another moment would have rolled upon the floor, had not Sister Marguerite caught him. With the aid of Dr. Arno, for whose opportune arrival she was more than grateful, she lifted the helpless man to his couch.

“His case is almost hopeless, Sister,” remarked the physician, shaking his head, despondingly. “I am sorry to say that fever has set in, leaving

small hopes that we may be able to pull him through."

"But God is good," interrupted the Sister, still breathless. "Merciful Heaven!" she ejaculated to herself, "do not permit this poor man to die with this heavy load upon his mind."

To many tales of sin and hidden heroism she had lent her patient ear and the willing aid of counsel and advice; but here before her lay, she feared, not a hero but a culprit. "And yet," she argued within herself, "delirious men must not be taken at their word. My poor countryman shall have the benefit of the doubt. I will neither judge nor condemn him."

"Have you made any important discoveries regarding our patient, Sister? His name, his home, or his relatives? It is incumbent upon us to try and learn all we can about him. Has he told you anything?"

"No, nothing of consequence," said the Sister. "But I gather that his parents and sister are dead. He is very reticent, and appears to resent any particular inquiries. It was owing to a careless question on my part that he became so excited."

"Well, more's the pity, Sister; we shall, I fear, be compelled to bury your countryman as a nameless hero, for nothing save a miracle can sustain him through this fever. Let the Sister of Bon Secour continue her night watches, and do both of you make a note of his ravings: they may be of service to us some day."

CHAPTER VII.

THREE weeks later Harold Manfred lay an emaciated wreck upon the bed. Death had fought hard for the mastery, but day and night the Sisters had toiled indefatigably, and, with the aid of prayer, their devotion and skill had wrenched the victim from its grasp.

Sœur Marie François, the clever night nurse, had taught the zeal and earnestness of her fellow-worker, and together they had striven with all the energy possible to save the sick Englishman.

During the past few weeks Sister Marguerite had often sat and watched her patient; she had caught words and phrases which to a casual listener would have conveyed nothing, but which her active mind pieced together into one of the saddest stories which it had ever been her lot to hear. She had studied Manfred's features too, and the thought that she had met him before often perplexed her, until one day, when the fever rendered him more ungovernable than usual, he cried out in delirious awe, glaring at her: "Ah, there she is again, the beautiful English girl who snubbed me so publicly because I jeered at some nuns."

In an instant the little scene in which she had played a part flashed before her mind; and though

altered and aged, she recognised in her helpless invalid one of the young men whose conduct she had once so boldly upbraided. But soon Manfred was raving again: now it was of a great house raised upon and from the scattered ruins of what once had been an abbey. Perplexed indeed became his nurse as she wondered who her patient could be.

As the days succeeded each other she collected from his ravings the names and places of people which tallied vaguely with the story poured into her ears by one who had sought her aid and sympathy, binding her at the same time to secrecy. Little wonder, then, that Sister Marguerite had struggled hard to save his life. His death might mean a continuation of sorrow to those who had already suffered long and patiently; should he live—well, it would go hardly with her if she could not succeed in mitigating their suffering, if she might not altogether disperse it.

“How novel, and yet how altogether marvellous, are the chances and changes of life,” pondered the Sister; and the old mischievous smile twitched her lips as she recalled the discomfiture of the two young men. “Yes, they were astonished enough at my conduct then; but who could have foreseen that he, whose delight it was to jeer at and make public sport of nuns, should, in a few years later, owe his life, under God, to their care and zeal. Nay,” she laughed, you cannot even yet cry quits, my friend; for when your reason returns, should it ever do so, you assuredly will *never* recognise *me*.”

For the last two days the sick man's fever had

materially abated, and for the first time during his illness Dr. Arno had spoken almost hopefully of the case, jokingly informing Sister Marguerite that he had come to the conclusion that there was no killing an Englishman.

"He is dreadfully weak, doctor, and will need no end of care if he is to rally, even when the fever has entirely passed away."

"True, Sister ; but what can you expect after all he has endured? Do you know," he said seriously, seating himself by the sick man's bed and looking earnestly at his poor thin face, "I have often marvelled why you have been so indefatigable in this case, as though you were determined that, in spite of himself, the poor man should live. Do you think he will altogether thank us for his life when he realises what a pitiable wreck he is? I am almost afraid that it will be necessary to amputate his remaining foot : it is not healing as it should. Indeed, speaking most seriously, I have often thought that it would have been a charity to let him die. Don't you agree with me, Sister?"

"No, no!" she cried ; "he must not die if we can save him."

"But why? You do not seem to realise how henceforth life can be but a burden to him."

"Life is always sweet ; there is never a greater burden than we can endure."

"I fear you do not understand what a terrible shock it must be to any man to feel that he can never again move as of old in society—to be unable, as this man will be, to move at all, save by the aid of another."

“Ah, doctor, there are higher aims in life than are recognised by society. They are often hollow and worthless.”

“You speak severely, Sister. One might be tempted to think that you had tested them and found disappointment.”

The quick colour dyed her face; she made no reply, but turned with dignity to resume her duties.

Dr. Arno watched her as he had frequently done before. Accustomed as he was to all classes and descriptions of nurses, never yet had he met with one who had displayed such unselfish devotion as the nun before him. He knew, he could see, that she was far from strong physically; yet never once had she spared herself or complained of the least ailment or fatigue. So great was his respect for her that a pang of remorse shot through him when he noted the blush on her face—the effect of his careless words. Poor long-suffering little Sister! He hoped he had not wounded her feelings.

“*Au revoir*, Sister,” said the Doctor, rising and moving towards her; “and pardon the thoughtless speech of an old man. We are clumsy creatures, even the best of us: and I am no better than the rest of my sex.”

“Oh, it is nothing; we are used to all kinds of things,” she answered brightly. “You are always very kind. It is my patient whom I fear; for, you must know, he cannot endure the sight of a nun near him.”

“Then he had better hide his feelings from me, the ungrateful wretch! and I shall tell him so

when he rallies sufficiently to understand my words. But for nuns, what would have become of him I should like to know? He would certainly have been permitted, as a charity to himself, to die; so if he values his life and what there is left of him, let him thank your unwearied care and exertion."

"Under God, doctor!"

"Oh, yes, yes, of course, if you will have it so. But I must not linger here, neither shall I be able to call so frequently as formerly. The terrors outside are increasing hourly, and I am needed in many places at once. So, *au revoir*, Sister, our patient is safe in your hands; but should you urgently need my aid, send for me at once. And may I ask that you will take a *little* care of yourself sometimes."

"Can you doubt it?" she answered laughing; and bowing her adieux, she closed the door gently after him.

We are not relating the history of old Madame Corbette, therefore we will assure the reader that her presence, though most unpleasantly evident to the Sisters, shall not trouble us much. Every moment that could be spared from her patient was spent by Sister Marguerite in attending to the wants of this ungrateful woman. It was well the poor Sister did not look for gratitude in return for all her kindness, as most certainly she received none; and in spite of the fact that *Ma Sœur* presented the old creature with two of the gold pieces found in the Englishman's pocket, she grew more and more exacting and jealous in proportion

as she observed the attention and care lavished upon the unwelcome stranger.

Once again Harold Manfred awoke to consciousness: and though this time his mind was easily fatigued, it was much clearer and steadier than formerly. The window was open, the cool spring air danced through the apartment; whilst the clear notes of a singing bird, which had alighted near, seemed to fill the room with joyous song. After listening some little time, and endeavouring to collect his thoughts, Harold opened his eyes and looked around. How very small the room appeared! How low the ceiling! But how bright and cleanly the aspect; and whiter and purer than aught else in view was the white *cornette* of a Sister of Charity! Wearily his eyes rested upon the face beneath it. Sister Marguerite was standing in a rapt attitude of attention, listening with obvious joy to the thrilling notes of the little songster. The violet eyes were raised and fixed; flushed with pleasure were the fair cheeks; and the merry lips were parted as though her own soul could well have burst forth into song and joined the happy chorister. For the first time in his life the sick man's eyes dwelt with pleasure upon the features of a nun. The face looked so young, so pure, so innocent, so full of human sympathy and kindness, that so long as she continued to listen his gaze was riveted upon her. At last, with a sudden spring into the air, the birdie ceased; away it flew, perhaps to brighten with its cheerful song the heart of some other sufferer.

"Sweet little visitor," said Sister Marguerite to herself, as she moved to the window and looked fondly after it; "would that you had tarried with us longer." As she turned her gaze fell upon her patient; their eyes met, and in his she recognised at once the steadfast light of reason.

"You are better!" she exclaimed joyfully. "Oh, I am so glad!" Then taking his hand kindly, "Tell me how you feel."

"Tired—so tired and weak! and so perplexed," was the faint rejoinder; "and my foot hurts me so."

"Does it?" she asked somewhat anxiously. "Now that is too bad; but never mind, we will try to relieve the pain if you will endeavour to be patient, and not worry yourself."

"Tell me all about it. How long have I been here?" he asked faintly. "What time of the year is it? I can listen to you now: your voice soothes me, and I seem to know your touch."

"You ought to do so," she said, smiling; "you have experienced enough of it lately to be weary of it. The fights you and I have had, to be sure! Sometimes I have almost given you up in despair, you were so obstinate."

He felt grateful, and endeavoured to smile in return. Then, as he passed his hand feebly over his face, his eyes expressed some distress when his hand came in contact with a stubbly beard.

"Do not allow trifles like that to disturb you," she said cheerily. "When you are a little stronger it can be easily removed."

"Come nearer to me and listen, for I can speak neither long nor loudly."

She drew a chair closer to him, but facing him ; and seating herself listened carefully whilst he continued faintly : " What am I to call you ? "

" At present ' Sister ' only ; when you are stronger you may call me ' Sister Marguerite ' if you wish. "

" Well then, Sister "—the word came with a little jerk ; even now it cost him a small pang to apply that name to a nun—" do not try to hide anything from me. I have lost a limb ? "

" Yes, you have ; but it was absolutely necessary ; and there are many poor men in this city at the present moment who are even worse off. "

" Dreadful, dreadful ! " he groaned. " But I was sure of it. The loss has been terribly present to me all the time. What on earth shall I do ? " And in the sigh which followed utter misery was expressed.

" Try to get well and *live* as you have never lived before, " was the prompt reply, spoken kindly and distinctly. " I am certain God has some great design in restoring to you your life. Gather together, then, the remainder of your strength, and devote it to deeds of greatness and generosity : then, indeed, will England add one more name to the long list of her heroes, and " (taking his hand kindly) " even I, only a poor Sister of Charity, shall be proud of my countryman. "

Manfred was surprised by the thrill of pleasure which shot through him when he anticipated earning her praise. Surely he must be verifying the prediction he had uttered years ago, when first he encountered that indignant schoolgirl : " Some one will be proud to call her friend some day. "

When next he awoke after a refreshing sleep, though she forbade him to talk, she drew a chair nearer to him, and unfolded to him gently and with wonderful tact all that had occurred ; softening the hard facts down, smoothing the rough points where she felt his pride would most be wounded, lighting the future with the glowing colours of happiness reaped from duty accomplished, so that tears, arising from feelings that had long been unknown to him, filled his eyes, and he hung upon her words endeavouring to draw strength from the brave spirit which possessed her.

Two days had elapsed, and Dr. Arno was astonished when he found the patient so far recovered as to be talking rationally to his nurse. Sister Marguerite glided from the room, hoping that the doctor might be more successful in obtaining information regarding her patient's affairs than she had been.

"I'm right glad to find you on the road to recovery at last," he began, seating himself and feeling Harold's pulse the while. "We've had precious hard work to pull you through, I do assure you. It's chiefly owing to the care of that little Sister there that you are a living man !"

"I am convinced of that, doctor ; but you should not say a living man, for I am merely a portion of one."

"Yes, yes. But you see that was quite unavoidable ; your leg, nearly as far as the thigh, was smashed to a jelly. I have tried my utmost to save the other. Well," he continued cheerfully, "no doubt the Sister has written to your friends in

84 Honour without Renown.

England, acquainting them with your condition and all that has occurred."

"No ; I see no reason to distress anyone on my account."

"Come, that is scarcely fair to them. Of course, it was in the execution of a grand deed that you met with your accident ; still, had we abandoned you to the mercy of those in whose cause you enlisted, in all probability they would have left you to die ; certainly, they would never have nursed or cared for you as we have done."

"I am well aware of that, doctor. But"—and his lips expressed a faint shadow of scorn as he spoke—"upon one subject set your mind quite at ease : you, and all who have aided me in my extremity, shall not go unrequited. I can afford to repay a generous deed. My name is Harold Manfred ; my parents are dead. I have no wife, and need render to no man an account of my actions." The first part of the sentence he spoke haughtily enough, but the latter portion stuck in his throat.

"Of course, of course," responded the medical man, moving uneasily in his chair, but immensely relieved : for to do him justice, the winter had been a weary one ; he had worked hard day and night ; his expenses were almost overwhelming, and taxes were likely to be a heavy burden for some time to come. "You must pardon me," he continued, "but we feared lest an anxious wife or mother might be mourning your mysterious disappearance."

, "Well, you understand me now," was the blunt rejoinder. "If you and Sister will continue your

kind care of me, on my word of honour as a gentleman, I will amply requite your generosity."

"There, there! my dear comrade!" exclaimed the doctor, patting the thin white hand which lay nearest to him, "France is not mercenary. It has, I assure you, been an honour as well as a pleasure to attend so brave a hero; I was but anxious on account of your friends."

"Once for all, allow them to rest, then: accept my thanks for all your kindness, and forgive me if I abstain from talking much; your language was always difficult to me, and it is doubly so just now. Will you, instead, tell me how things are progressing outside?"

"Thank God, the troops are advancing surely, if slowly. Yet we live in absolute dread of what may occur when these rebels are driven to bay. I pity our dignitaries of the Church, and every one who wears the religious garb. Having brutally murdered their own leaders, they will strike without remorse at religion, if only to slake their rage and disappointment upon some one, the loss of whom will be a cause of public mourning."

Manfred listened attentively. Was it possible that, only a few weeks ago, he too had hated the religious garb—nay, had even fought for these bloodthirsty Revolutionists? Now what if these lawless wretches should set upon and murder poor little Sister Marguerite on her journeyings to and fro—her errands of mercy and charity to *him*! The very thought caused him to break into a cold perspiration, and all that was manly within him rose up in arms at the bare idea of such an atrocity.

How could *she* defend herself, poor, helpless little thing ! “ Are the streets safe, doctor ?—I mean, can women traverse them unprotected ? ” he gasped.

“ Decidedly not ; but our ladies do not run that risk at any time ; they usually have an escort. Now they rarely venture out unless it is absolutely necessary.”

Again Manfred was silent. Twice a day Sister Marguerite ran that risk for his sake, and if she had an escort it consisted only of a poor man or woman.

“ Well, Monsieur Manfred,” said the doctor, noting the softened expression on the man’s face, “ Would you like to see a priest ? No ? Then an English clergyman, or a religious minister of any description ? I will endeavour to aid you to the best of my ability, for I do not consider you out of danger.”

“ Thank you ”—in a stiff and stilted tone—“ but similar assistance has already been offered me, and I have declined it with thanks.”

“ Oh, well, Monsieur, no offence,” and the doctor rose as he spoke—“ it is part of our duty, you know, to remember the soul as well as the body. But if yours needs no spiritual aid, it’s lucky for you—that’s all. But one question more, and I will relieve you of my presence. Our hospitals are full ; still, should you desire more comfortable surroundings—and it may be better advice, I will endeavour to have you removed to some locality where you may stand a better chance of meeting with both. What do you say ? ”

“ Simply that I have a strange fancy to remain

where I am for the present." He endeavoured to bow a courteous dismissal to the doctor as he spoke, but much of the dignity he wished to express was lost from the strained position of his neck.

Taking the hint, and wishing Manfred an abrupt adieu, Dr. Arno quitted the room, and after issuing a few last instructions to Sister Marguerite, passed from the cottage.

"A cold-hearted, unsatisfactory sort of creature," he muttered to himself. "And now that he is on the fair road to recovery, I'll leave him to the Sister's care, and not trouble myself about him more than is absolutely necessary."

CHAPTER VIII.

"I WONDER what I shall owe you—to what amount I shall be indebted to you for all this? Let me see; for how many weeks have you been in attendance on me?"

She was standing with her back towards him, facing the chest of drawers, engaged in spreading some cooling salve upon a linen cloth intended to relieve his foot, when he thus addressed her; and not quite comprehending his meaning, she turned with a quick but amused glance of inquiry towards him.

"I mean," he went on to explain, "what shall I owe you for all your services?"

He was beginning to regain strength, and the softer part of his nature was departing. There was a ring of condescension in his voice which chased the bright smile from her face. She raised her head after the manner of the dear, wilful school-girl, Beatrice de Woodville, but continued her work in silence. Receiving no reply, he addressed her again.

"Don't be ashamed," he said, "to name a sum; you have saved my life, and, what is more, you have actually taught me to respect a nun."

"I am not ashamed, unless for *you*," she answered as calmly as she could; and there was inborn dignity in her bearing as she turned and faced him. "But if it be true that I have taught you to respect a nun, then why seek to humiliate me?"

He rose upon his elbows, staring at her in astonishment. How like she was *now* to that beautiful girl. What a marvellous resemblance!

"How humiliate you, Sister?" he exclaimed, feeling strangely moved as he gazed upon her "I meant what I said in good part."

"I suppose you did," she answered, lowering her eyes and struggling with herself. "I must excuse your ignorance."

"On my honour as a gentleman, I will pay you in current gold for your services!"

She faced him fully now, and the old flash of scorn lit up her eyes as she spoke; for in her secret heart she despised the man before her and longed to bring him to reason. "Are you then really so ignorant as to suppose that a Sister of Charity devotes her life to works of mercy in the hope of earning gold as her reward—or that she lives only for the good opinion of those for whom she labours? No, you cannot think it! You know it is not true. Keep your gold; or rather bestow it, if you will, upon the poor, the sick, and the orphan, that they in return may plead for God's mercy in your behalf; perhaps you need it!" She paused abruptly, as though the subject was distasteful to her, and it was some seconds ere he dared to speak again. Without taking his eyes from her face, he ventured to ask in a low tone:

“Then if not to earn a livelihood, why do you do it?”

“Why?”—and the words issued with living fervour from the mobile lips, whilst her eyes, gazing through the open window, were fixed upon the blue sky—“why? I will tell you. For the sole love of Him to whose service we consecrate our lives. It is His will alone we seek, His love and approval alone we heed, and to Him alone do we look for recompense. Do you think,” she continued—and a flash of pride mingled with the almost sublime look on her face—“that money could ever repay or satisfy the heart that has learnt to love and live for its God alone, that untold wealth could suffice to stimulate our weak nature, or to give us courage? Ah, you do not understand the meaning of words like these—*you*, who have lived for yourself alone. But rather would I belong to God and be the poorest beggar upon earth, than be the wealthiest of earth’s monarchs without Him.”

He held his breath as he listened to her, but could not still the beating of his heart. What did she know of him? What would she say next? Who was she? Strange, too, how her voice and face haunted him! But she, seeming almost unconscious of his presence, walked slowly towards the casement, and leaning her arms upon the sill pressed the crucifix which usually hung at her side to her lips, apparently buried in prayer or reverie. Was she asking for strength and courage for herself, or for grace and mercy for her patient? Perhaps for both.

In a few moments she turned, and with a half-suppressed sigh resumed her work at the chest of drawers which served her as a table. Having at last spread the salve to her satisfaction, she carried the dressing to the still sore and aching foot, and commenced gently and in silence to unfold the old bandages. Her face was more serious than usual, and her mind seemed preoccupied, for every now and again she paused as though thinking deeply.

"Sister," at last ventured Manfred, who had never taken his eyes from her face during the operation, "forgive me, but you are the very image of some one whom I met some years ago."

"Am I?" she said, scarce heeding his remark.

"Yes; and when you speak as you did just now, the resemblance to her is more striking than ever."

"The resemblance to whom?" she asked, looking up with more interest.

"Ah, I will not say who she was; of course, you cannot be she. But hers was the most beautiful face I ever saw."

"Was it really? Then I fail to see how I can resemble her."

"Yes, it has been a puzzle to me ever since I saw you. Nevertheless, you do resemble her, and more than ever when you are moved; then you act and speak as she did."

"You must have known her intimately for her conduct to have left such an impression upon you."

"On the contrary, I saw her but once; yet, should I live to the age of Mathusala, I shall never forget the scene. It was on board a

steamer crossing the Channel. The wind was blowing fresh and keen, the crested waves were rolling merrily, and the steamer rose and fell as she cut her way defiantly through the bright waters. There were many passengers aboard, and most of them were thoroughly enjoying the invigorating breeze, whilst a friend and I were amusing ourselves at the cost of two French nuns—poor sickly-looking creatures they were; one of them could barely stand—when bang down in our midst bore this English beauty. She was swelling with indignation, and constituted herself their champion and protector.”

“I hope you felt thoroughly ashamed of your conduct,” said Sister Marguerite with spirit.

“I did; but I felt also a strange presentiment that I should meet her again some day, and that she would play an active part in my destiny.”

Sister Marguerite made no reply, but her head was lowered a little; she seemed to be examining the wound more closely. Manfred continued:

“You should have seen how she treated those nuns. Why, if they had been her superiors her behaviour could not have been more deferential.”

“Pray how do you know that they were not her superiors in birth as well as in sanctity?”

“Have I not already told you that she was of noble birth, that she was young, wealthy, and beautiful? It could never have fallen to her lot to become——” he hesitated.

“One of us? Why not say it out?”

“Well, Sister, it does not seem to me probable that such a thing could occur.”

"I believe you! How should you understand the motives of self-sacrifice?"

"You are severe, and for all you know unjust, in your judgments, Sister."

"I hope I am neither the one nor the other; but you are both, or why should you deem it impossible that none save the lowly, the ignorant, and the destitute should be the chosen of God?"

"I have always read and been told on the very best authority, that none save the miserable and disappointed seek refuge in a convent."

"And *I* am supposed to be a specimen of the poor disconsolate ones," she said, springing lightly to her feet. "Well, well, at least have the kindness to reserve your pity and sympathy until I crave them. But what became of the wonderful girl of whom you spoke? Surely you followed her destiny?"

"I saw her met by her friends; I traced her birth, her parentage; then other matters claimed attention; and when next I sought for her she was gone, having left no trace by which I could pursue her."

"'Tis a pity," she answered, adjusting his pillows; "had you traced her destiny, it might have been a revelation to you."

"I shall meet her again some time; I know not when nor where: but since I have been lying here ill and alone, her influence has frequently seemed to be upon me."

She had finished her duties for the present, so passed from the smaller chamber to attend to the more immediate wants of old Madame Corbette,

who day by day was growing weaker and more imbecile. The harsh voice was heard less frequently now—whether from sheer inability to scream or because pangs of remorse visited her occasionally is unknown. But Sister Marguerite redoubled her exertions to ease the sufferings and soften the heart of the old woman. And to a small extent she had her reward: for though completely bedridden now, the hard visage would brighten perceptibly at the sound of “Sister’s” voice or step, and even the distorted old fingers would occasionally seek the kind hand and press it as though in gratitude.

During the rest of that morning Manfred lay silent. He was meditating as he had not done for years. Something in the conversation he had had that morning with the Sister of Charity had renewed the lively vision of girlish loveliness which had been secretly cherished in his heart for years. He allowed his mental gaze to rivet itself upon the picture, until, groaning inwardly, he cried, “Oh, if only it had been my happy lot to be led by such a mind as hers, never should I have fallen to such depths!” The words of Sister Marguerite seemed to vibrate in his mind. Why did her voice, and hers alone of all whom he had ever met, sound the selfsame note of scorn? Why had her face the same inspired look as hers, whose image he had so long and so silently revered? There was a mystery somewhere. Surely he was distraught, or were there stranger things in real life than were ever fancied in fiction? No, no! he must bear in mind the fact that his nurse was after all but a simple Sister of

Charity ! But since the other had passed from his sight for ever, he would yield to that strong impulse which day by day was gaining force within him ; he would endeavour to shake off the old life and transfer this long cherished respect to the ministering angel at his side ; yes, he would trust to her hearing what he had never revealed to a fellow-creature ; more than that, he would even look to her for counsel and advice. "The burden is becoming too heavy for me," he cried, "and I know no one to whom I can turn in my distress save this little Sister of Charity." "Besides," whispered his good angel, "remember, that if you should die, reparation will then be impossible."

CHAPTER IX.

"You are not well to-day," observed Sister Marguerite a few days later, seating herself near the couch of her patient. "Is your foot more painful than you look so depressed?"

"It does hurt me unmercifully at times, but it is not only that which disturbs me. I have been thinking."

"It does us good to think sometimes; we realise then how short, and therefore how precious, are the fast fleeting hours."

"I was never deemed a sentimental man. Whether this illness has unnerved and weakened me I know not, but now and again I feel stirred and overpowered by impulses and feelings which are altogether foreign to my nature."

"If the impulses produce softer and purer sentiments than any you have experienced heretofore, yield fully to them, and be assured that they will bring peace."

Manfred's large brown eyes wandered round the little room, settling themselves at last upon the face of Sister Marguerite, who was stitching quietly.

She might well speak of peace and joy, for was she not the very personification of both as she sat there, her pure brow unruffled and her merry eyes and lips ready to break into laughter at the smallest

provocation—thought her patient as he lay gazing upon her. Wherein lay the secret of it all?—ah, he would give worlds to know.

“Sister,” he said solemnly, and their eyes met: “do you really and honestly think that I shall recover?—I mean sufficiently to enjoy life again.”

“Even though you should have to endure yet more bodily pain, I trust that, considering your strong constitution, you may yet recover; but to enjoy life?”—and the honest eyes looked volumes—“to do that, one must possess a conscience free from grievous stain.”

“I know not how it is,” he said, with more earnestness than usual, “but I trust *you* as I have never trusted human being before, and I would fain tell you something—confess to you a story which lies like a load upon my heart. Would you listen to me?”

“Why not tell it to those whose office authorises them to listen to such tales? Their advice would be of service to you.”

His good angel had well-nigh conquered when the evil spirit whispered again, “Caution! why place your liberty in the hands of anyone?” He hesitated a moment, then shaking off the evil influence, continued, “If I may not tell it to you, Sister, then I will never reveal it to any living soul.”

“Since it must be so then, Mr. Manfred, speak to me openly, and rest assured that to the utmost of my ability I will aid you.” She spoke calmly, but her heart was beating quickly.

“Sit where I can see you better, Sister; let the

light fall upon your face : the sight of it will give me encouragement. Yes, that will do !” as she moved her chair in the endeavour to please him, and taking up her sewing, fixed her eyes upon the work as though her mind were concentrated only upon the size and evenness of her stitches.

Again Manfred paused, and each instant the spirit of evil seemed to be gaining ascendancy over him. At last he began :

“What I am about to tell you, Sister, relates entirely to friends of mine ; you understand ?”

She did not, but feeling she must do something, nodded her head.

“It is most unpleasant to be the bearer of these secrets,” he continued, smoothing the coverlet with one hand nervously, “and I feel convinced that to share it with you will ease my heart of a considerable load, and I can look to you for counsel. Moreover, I feel certain that you will treat my confidence as sacred.”

“Listen !” she answered, allowing the work to drop upon her lap, and looking steadily at him. “I do not seek your confidence, neither will I be bound by any obligation of secrecy. I simply state my desire to assist you as far as I may be permitted, and as regards anything else you must leave me the use of my own discretion.”

What could she do ? To refuse to listen might be to deprive the man of his only chance of repentance ; and if he should die, might she not then be better able to right the wrong if the opportunity occurred ? Once more she tightened her grasp of her work and prayed to do only what was right.

Manfred scarcely heeded her remark. If he noted it at all, it did not trouble him ; for he felt convinced that a nun, whose interests were so far removed from the world in which he was known and lived, could not possibly come in contact with any of the actors in such a drama. The silence was becoming a trifle monotonous, only the click of the little steel thimble being heard as it drove the needle vigorously forward.

“Well !” she said at last, allowing her work to drop once more upon her knee, whilst she looked up with an amused glance of inquiry—“if the rest of the story is not more interesting than that which you have related to me during the last five minutes, I must beg of you to allow me to withdraw my chair to a more shady part of the room ; really as I sit here the glare of light is most trying.”

“No, no ! Do please remain where you are. I was but wondering where to begin. Bear with me and be your own kind self ; it will give me more confidence to speak.” Once more the merry eyes were shaded by the long dark lashes, and the sweet face gradually assumed that trustworthy look of enduring patience, so often now its necessary expression ; and Manfred, as he gazed upon her, felt that desire increase within him to lay open to her judgment sorrows and troubles which he had never dared to expose to mortal before.

“Doubtless you are fond of children,” he resumed, after a pause, “so let me tell you that once, a long time ago, there were two little boys, half-brothers, with a difference of but two years between

them. Their mother was a woman of deep passions, of violent likes and dislikes. She was devotedly attached to a man whom we will name Manly, and was engaged to be married to him. Unfortunately, she grew frantically jealous of the necessary and innocent attentions which her lover bestowed upon a cousin, and flying into a blind rage, she quarrelled with her *fiancé* and dismissed him. All his endeavours to pacify her, to assure her of the falsity of the reports which had reached her, were futile. Blinded by jealousy, she would not listen to reason : so taking her at her word, he left her and set sail for Australia. Now, as fate would have it, the cousin—for reasons of her own, but unknown to Manly—took a passage in the same ship, and gossip was not slow to report that they had been privately married. Shortly after this another gentleman, one who for a long time had secretly loved the aggrieved lady, came forward and offered by his faithful love to heal her wounded heart. In her resentment she accepted, and married this generous and warm-hearted man, whom we will call Edmund.”

The Sister started : surely the busy needle must have pricked her finger. But Manfred, engrossed in his story, noticed nothing. He continued :

“Edmund was a distant cousin of his wife’s, and was also the youngest son of an old baronet who, just before these events took place, had joined the majority, leaving to his eldest son a beautiful estate, comprising a hall and the broad acres of an old abbey, with its stately ruins. Sir Henry, the elder son, was many years older than Edmund ;

and these two, between whom the closest ties of brotherly love existed, were the sole living descendants of a family whose representatives had been favourites at the Court of Henry VIII. Edmund inherited for his portion the Manor Farm of two hundred acres, which adjoined the estate of his brother; and thither he brought his stately wife.

“ Ere a year had elapsed a son was born, and he also received the name of Edmund. He was but two months old when misfortune fell upon the master of the Manor House. Manly returned, as he had gone, a single man ! To depict the grief and remorse of his former *fiancée* would be impossible. Edmund, her husband—for whom she had never really cared—had always been delicate. Comprehending but too plainly how matters stood, he lost heart and his health quite failed him. Generous as he was, he never once upbraided his wife for her neglect of him, but left her the sole inheritor of the house and all that he possessed. But before he died, this good husband and father made a great effort. Struggling to his feet, he dragged his weary limbs up the steep grassy walk which led to the old Abbey Towers, bearing in his arms the infant whom he loved so tenderly. Ever and anon he sat and rested ; for small and light as the burden was, it was more than he could sustain for long. All that he now realised was that he was carrying his little treasure, his tiny Edmund, to give him to Henry’s charge—Henry, who had been to himself as a father. To no one else would he trust his darling. He had reached the very spot where for centuries no blade of grass had been

visible—the nave of the old Abbey church. This place had ever possessed a strange fascination for him; and a feeling of security, almost of peace, stole over him as, having laid the baby tenderly down on the soft earth, he sank upon a broken buttress.”

“Poor man!” ejaculated the tender-hearted listener, as drawing forth her coarse handkerchief she wiped the sympathetic tear from her eye. Then in a low tone, as though communing with herself, she murmured: “Poor weary sufferer, alas! might he not well feel a sensation of peace and calm steal over him when seated amid the magic influence of such surroundings.”

Then warming to a subject which was always most dear to her, she continued. “Have you not often experienced a mysterious thrill of inexplicable awe, as strolling through the melancholy ruins of our ancient monasteries and abbeys you have realised—as *surely* you *must* have done—that warm living hands, like your own, toiled with labour and pride to pile together those massive walls; that for centuries men and women of all ages and degrees, guided by the light of faith, flocked to these sanctuaries to pour out before God’s altar the burning love of their hearts. Has no feeling of desecration moved you? No voice, as from the silent dead, sounded in your ears, bidding you tread with light and reverent step the consecrated ground wherein once your ancestors were wont to lay the sainted bones of their noblest and best? Ah, believe me that they who reared those walls had no stinted notions of what

was due to God. Their conceptions of Him were great and vast, as likewise were the temples they raised to His honour. And *you* have felt nought of this?" she asked again, reading aright the look of astonishment on his face.

He shook his head, but ventured no response, simply signed to her to continue.

The neglected needlework fell to the floor as suddenly she rose to her feet, and advancing towards the window, fixed her eyes upon the narrow space of sky perceptible through the small casement, and as though gazing upon one of memory's living pictures she continued :

"'Tis a marvel ! Nay I can scarce conceive how men of one generation can so easily forget all that their forefathers prized and held most dear. Often, indeed, they forget even the very resting-places of those whose wealth or sacred possessions they rightly or wrongfully hold as their own. There are no spots in all the kingdom half so dear to me as are the consecrated spaces whereon once stood our venerated abbeys. For hours I have wandered amid these desecrated aisles. Often have I toyed with the massive stone work in their dilapidated walls, marvelling at the strength and solidity of its masonry. How proudly I have stroked and caressed some magnificent remnant of carving, which chance, not pity, has rescued from the ruthless hand of destruction. So soft, cool, and soothing the stone felt, as reverently I pressed my burning cheek upon it, praying inwardly for him whose able hand had wrought and traced the unique design. If seated upon a carved or mossy

stone, the very ground beneath has claimed my homage and respect, for lo! deep below the sod and ruins repose the blessed bones of ancient saints laid peacefully to rest. And though I may have sat alone in body, where once *they* knelt, who perchance were my kith and kin in blood as well as in heart and faith, still, believe me, I was not, nor did I ever *feel alone*. And *you?*" she questioned, turning fully towards him: "you have perhaps *lived* amid such scenes, and never felt the least enthralled by the power or fascination of the past?"

"Never! I forgot it all. I never thought of it like that," he answered in a low tone, as though fearful to disturb the earnestness of her words and manner.

"Never *thought* of it," she repeated to herself. "How strange! Then surely it were an almost impossible task to explain to one like you the joy that I have felt, the sweet but realistic visions that my fanciful brain has oft-times conjured."

She raised her eyes with a rapt, upward look, and continued in a low, impressive tone, as though communing with herself, and still regretful that he should have lived unmoved amid such scenes:

"Never thought of it! And often, oh, how often—

With throbbing heart I've sat and watched
The weeping ruins round,
Till fancy lent her magic wand,
Transforming sight and sound.

No more were columns flung apart
In desecrated heap;
With one gigantic bound they rose,
As from eternal sleep.

Leaping from pillar to pillar,
Spanning the vacant space,
Rose row on row of arches,
Unrivalled of their race.

Strong and massive, light and graceful,
Oh, who could count their cost ?
Riveted, I gazed upon them,
In raptur'd wonder lost.

Then higher yet and higher still
The mighty roof arose,
Crowning the sacred edifice
In bold and grand repose.

From marble steps the altar glowed,
All shining white and gold ;
The tapers gleamed, the organ pealed,
Exultant volleys rolled.

While soaring amid the sunbeams
Which pierced the jewelled glass,
Floated clouds of perfumed incense,
At high and solemn Mass.

Or rolling as mighty billows,
From chancel back to nave,
Came full-toned chant of liturgy,
In rythmic wave on wave.

Small need was there to bid me kneel
In adoration low ;
I felt the breath of multitudes
Seething to and fro.

I bowed my head in humble prayer,
I felt no more alone ;
Prelates, monks, babes, all suppliants,
We knelt around the throne.

She ceased abruptly, as though suddenly recalled to the present. A deeper colour flushed her cheek as she quietly sank into her chair once more and resumed her work. "Please forgive this ill-timed interruption to your story," she pleaded.

"And yet, 'tis a subject I love. Never, never ! will dear old England realise the sorrow and regret which fills her children's hearts as they wander through the neglected ruins of her most venerated shrines. Enough of this ! I must endeavour to restrain my feelings by keeping them under more severe control."

"Nay, why did your song cease so abruptly ? You carried me with you, and as though a veil had suddenly dropped from my eyes, I was looking upon familiar scenes with a keener interest and clearer perception than I had ever done before."

"Call it not a *song* !" she replied, merrily shaking her head. "Nor mistake a little warmth of feeling, badly expressed, for real genius. I possess no talent whatsoever. Even if able to conceive, I cannot portray. But," as if to herself, "I knew one dear girl who could." She thought of Madge. "Now, please proceed with your story. You left the father and child in my beloved old ruins."

"Yes ; and there they remained until the sun was well-nigh sinking to rest. Too weak and ill to move, Edmund gave way to the lethargy that had stolen over him, and seated with his elbows on his knees, he rested his weary head between his hands, and perhaps—who knows—may have seen visions and heard sounds similar to those you but now recounted to me. And still the baby slept."

CHAPTER X.

"SIR HENRY had been from home for a few days, but returning suddenly, learned with horror from his servants of the serious illness of his brother. Waiting for neither rest nor refreshment, he summoned his favourite dog, a black retriever, and struck hastily across the park in a direct line for the Manor House. At the ancient ruins he paused impatiently to ascertain the cause of the dog's sudden bark of recognition. Looking through a broken arch, he beheld a scene that henceforth he never forgot. For half a minute he stood as one petrified, powerless to advance. What was the meaning of the picture, framed in the broken arch, half covered with lichen and ivy, lighted by the rays of the setting sun? Was that wasted form indeed that of his younger brother? Near him, on the grass, lay what? Sir Henry started. A little roll of white clothes, from the midst of which appeared a tiny head, bare of any covering save the silken golden curls.

"Down! Bosco, down!" And at the sound of Sir Henry's voice the shadow started. Overcome with delight at the welcome vision of his elder brother, poor Edmund stretched forth his hands, exclaiming:

“ ‘Oh Harry, dear Harry, I knew you would come! Take care of my boy for me.’ But the sudden relief and joy were too much for him; bounding forward, the elder man was only just in time to catch his brother as he fell forward in a heavy swoon.

“Supporting the poor weak frame with one arm, the stronger man drew from his pocket an envelope, and scribbling hastily upon it an appeal for assistance, called the dog and bade him carry it back to the Abbey Towers. Bosco, seeming fully to take in the sad situation, needed no second bidding, but scampered off, the note between his teeth. Then Sir Henry, with a sorrowful countenance, still supporting his brother’s helpless form, set his teeth and waited.

“The dog performed his errand faithfully. Scarcely five minutes had elapsed ere, almost breathless, the coachman and stable-boy arrived. Addressing the latter, the baronet said sternly :

“ ‘Take the child and carry it carefully to the Hall, and give it at once into Mrs. Turner’s charge.’

“With soiled and trembling hands the boy stooped and raised the sleeping mite, almost letting it drop in his extreme nervousness: he had never before seen his master so disturbed. Sir Henry watched his exit from the ruins; then, without another word, he motioned the coachman to raise his brother’s feet, and placing his own arms firmly and tenderly under poor Edmund’s shoulders, bore him back to the old home of his boyhood, even to the very room that had always been his

own ; and there, with the tenderness of a mother the elder man watched and nursed his brother till he died."

"Ah, I feared he would die."

"Yes, he was half delirious when he left his home."

"And where was the heartless wife all this time?"

"Shut up in her private chamber, rocking herself to and fro, overwhelmed in such grief that it was feared her reason would succumb. But do not call her heartless ; she was not that, nor did her husband reproach her. Almost his last words were : ' Don't blame her, Harry, she only made a mistake. But to your sole charge I leave my boy. *She* will never need him, and must never have him. You will bring him up to be a good man like yourself ! teach him to love his father's memory. God bless you, Harry ! ' So he died."

"Poor man !" ejaculated Sister Marguerite once more ! and even Manfred's voice shook as he said :

"If I am to continue, will you kindly remove your seat to some place where I cannot see your face quite so distinctly ?"

"Willingly," she replied, smiling to herself ; for was it not at his own particular request that she was seated where she was ? It was with pleasure then that she withdrew her chair from its prominent position, and placing it out of sight at the head of his bed, seated herself and resumed her work in silence.

"The services of the old family nurse were called once more into requisition, and after the quiet but

sad funeral of his brother every one knew that from henceforth, to be friends with Sir Henry they must be good to Edmund's boy. It seemed as though the guardian uncle was registering a vow, for ere the remains of the parent had been lowered into their last resting place, he knelt beside the coffin, and taking the baby in his arms, prayed silently for some moments; then, after fondly kissing the tiny brow, gently restored the little fellow to his nurse. Are you listening, Sister?"

"I am, indeed. Sir Henry, as you call him, was a good man. I suppose he had another name? Could the widow not afford one tear for her husband's grave?"

"Why should you be so hard upon her?" he inquired testily. "She never cared for her first husband?"

"But recovered sufficiently to marry again, did she?" and Sister Marguerite made a significant grimace, which, however, could not be observed by her patient. Manfred took no heed of her remark, but continued:

"Sir Henry, having taken upon himself the guardianship of the boy, Edmund's widow left her house and left the neighbourhood. Then, of course, she married Manly; and before a year had passed another son was born. It has taken a great deal of telling, but this is how there came to be so little difference in age between the two half-brothers."

"I understand it better now. What was the name of this new baby—little Edmund's half-brother?"

"Let me see," he said, in a slow, hesitating tone of voice.

"Suppose we call it Harold?" observed Sister Marguerite quietly.

"Harold!" he exclaimed excitedly, raising his body on his elbows and straining his neck to catch a glimpse of her face. "Why call it Harold, I should like to know?"

"Oh"—gravely and slowly—"it is a good old Saxon name, and seemed to come uppermost in my mind at the moment." As she spoke she held her work at arm's length, as though deeply engrossed in keen criticism of it.

He watched her as closely as his position allowed for a few more seconds, then sank back upon his pillows, and with a half-satisfied expression in his voice continued :

"Well, Harold let it be then, since you seem to like the name so much. But it is all in keeping with the rest of your strange notions to fix upon a name which no one else would ever have dreamed of."

In her place of vantage Sister Marguerite felt she could now indulge in tears or grim faces as the mood should suit her. At this moment she looked very knowing, but wisely held her peace. He continued :

"Of the early years of Harold's life I know little or nothing, but believe that they were spent abroad. However, when he was about six years old his father died ; and the grief of his mother at the loss of her husband was as sincere and deep as had been her love of him. Almost broken-hearted, and with but small means of existence, Mrs. Manly returned, a widow for the second time, to the old

Manor House. From Sir Henry she received but a cold welcome, and strict orders upon no condition to interfere with young Edmund. She had chosen, he said, to desert the boy and his father in their hour of need, and henceforth she had no claim whatever upon her son. She did not seek to vindicate herself, and appeared to take no interest in any one or anything save the child of her second marriage. Upon him she concentrated all the passionate devotion that a nature like hers was capable of bestowing. I shall not linger unnecessarily over incidents that are of no very special consequence, but simply state the essential facts.

“It was pretty hard, I can assure you, for Harold as he grew up and began to realise more fully how matters stood, to see his half-brother treated as a young prince, to know also that he would inherit the old Towers and all Sir Henry’s wealth, whilst his own portion would consist of the Manor Farm alone, which, by the way, was mortgaged to the hilt. It seemed unfair—for Edmund was richly endowed by nature also, as such favourites of fortune sometimes are. He was handsome and talented. With study and diligence he could have made a living by his brush; besides which he had a splendid voice, and a very good ear for music. No doubt he had the best of masters that money could procure, and every advantage was his; but he did not seem to value his position and gifts as he should have done; at least, had Harold changed places with him, I dare say he would have appreciated them better. The two boys became friendly.

Edmund, you see, could afford to patronise ; he could also afford to be generous ; and to give him his due, he always did his best to make Harold's life happy. But under such unequal circumstances—one boy possessing all things, the other only that which was doled out to him by his more fortunate brother—it was but natural that Harold should grow up dissatisfied and jealous. Scarcely a day passed but he sought relief from his mother's sympathetic heart, pouring into her ears the insults and wrongs he had to endure from Edmund ; making her the recipient of all his griefs, real and imaginary. Being comparatively but poorly off, she could only hold out hopes to her darling which to him seemed improbable and unreal. Year by year he grew more gloomy and discontented, until envy and jealousy took such deep root in his mind that they grew into positive hatred ; and by the time they were respectively sixteen and eighteen years old, poor Harold could not endure the sight of his handsome, cheery half-brother. Nor could I blame him !” declared Manfred with vehemence. “It was hard indeed that by a freak of Nature one should have everything and the other next to nothing ! Don't you agree with me, Sister ?”

“Did it never strike Harold,” was the quiet rejoinder, “that the very house in which he lived belonged by hereditary right to Edmund also ? Really, I cannot see how any one could blame the boy, if his uncle chose to make him his heir ! I suppose he liked him ?”

“Liked him ? Why he simply worshipped him—idolised him—lived for him !” Manfred ground

out the sentence between his clenched teeth. "Edmund never knew then what it was to want for anything! He had all the luck. Poor Harold had none."

"Still, one could hardly blame him for being fortunate. Was he not kind to Harold?"

"Kind? Yes, that was the worst of it: he shared everything with him as far as he dared; but Sir Henry did not like the younger boy, and he had too much pride and spirit to beg from either of them!"

"Well," said Sister Marguerite, nodding her head emphatically. "Had I been Harold, I should have made up my mind to face the situation manfully; and in order to make the best of things, should have endeavoured to earn my own living, thus winning at the same time the respect of Sir Henry and my half-brother, who doubtless would have admired my spirit and assisted me in the future."

"Which proves how little you can fathom the feelings of a gentleman like Harold, to whom work was not only distasteful, but derogatory."

The words were spoken hastily, and in an injured tone of voice; whilst a pair of arched eyebrows rose significantly, and two little lips smiled an amused and superior smile as they inquired:

"Pray were the brothers at all alike in appearance, and did not Mrs. Manly admire her elder son?"

"No, she did not. She was true to Harold, and the memory of his father. Day by day mother and son discussed the unsatisfactory state of affairs,

until they persuaded themselves that there was a gross injustice somewhere, and that if Sir Henry did not equalise matters of his own accord, well, then pressure of some sort should be brought to bear upon him. Cost what it might, Harold should have his share, and the longer he waited for it the greater should be his portion." There was a smothered sigh from the little corner, but no remark.

"You asked if they resembled each other in appearance; yes, in features there was a strong likeness. But Edmund was taller, of more muscular build; his eyes were the same dark blue as his father's. Of course he was always well dressed, and being looked upon as the heir, folks said he was much the handsomer of the two."

"Did he turn out well?"

"No, he didn't. And as Manfred gnashed out the words, he glared like a wild animal, whilst his hands were so tightly clenched that the sharp nails pierced the delicate skin.

Neither the gesture nor the expression was lost upon the observant listener; but fearing the effect of too much excitement upon her patient she came forward, and taking his hand kindly said:

"It is getting late, and I hear voices in the little parlour. You must not talk any more now. To-morrow you may continue your story."

Large beads of perspiration stood upon his brow, but at her gentle touch his features relaxed. Seizing both her hands he exclaimed: "Don't go, Sister. Don't leave me yet! I do not feel myself. Oh, why did you hide in the

dark background? I feel quite a different being when I see your face. Come early to-morrow," he pleaded, "and sit near me—close beside me—whilst I finish my story. An evil influence seems to overpower me when you are not near. Why did you hide?" She fed him, soothed and quieted him with marvellous skill and patience, and did not leave until peace and calm reigned once more within him.

CHAPTER XI.

"THANK GOD?" gasped Sister Marguerite the following morning, as she sank breathless into a vacant chair near Madame Corbette's bedside. "Thank God for safe shelter at last. Oh, I have had a race for it indeed? Once I feared the ruffianly soldiers would overtake me. Listen!"—laying her hand upon the coverlet and assuming an attitude of fearful attention—"can you not hear the roll of musketry? They are but a mile or two off now. *Mon Dieu!* but it is terrible how they fight! What must it be like in the city? Poor dear Ma Sœur! God grant that she and the rest of the Sisters are safe. It was so good and thoughtful of her to attach me to this branch Convent close by: otherwise I must long since have discontinued my visits to you."

A bony claw was stretched forth, as though in grateful response, clutching tightly the little hand of the speaker in a grasp almost expressive of protection. How, indeed, would the painful hours, and the weary days, ever have passed but for the cheery presence of the kind little heart beside her? Her departure from the cottage meant darkness again; her return, sunshine, comparative ease, and renewed hope. So thought Manfred, as the welcome tones of her voice fell upon his ear; and he heaved a deep sigh of relief and actually thanked

God that He had raised up these gentle creatures, endowing them with such charity and skill. Was it possible that only a short time since, only a few weeks ago, he had treated with contempt a wearer of the *cornette*. What a fool he had been !

"My foot has been so painful, Sister," he moaned piteously when, having at last finished her ministrations to the old woman, she cheerfully came forward to attend to him.

She made no immediate reply, but a look of anxiety passed over her face as she bent and examined carefully the troublesome wound. Then she shook her head solemnly, merely observing : "No, it is not healing as it should do." Mentally she concluded : "It is worse, far worse than it was ; the colour is bad, and the pain great ; there is internal irritation somewhere ! Alas, the knife will be necessary after all, I fear. It is dreadful !"

After fulfilling all her tedious duties, Sister Marguerite, at the request of Manfred, seated herself once more with the still unfinished garment upon her knee, awaiting the continuation of his story. Every now and again a brisk shower would patter against the window pane, while the room grew dark. Then the fresh keen wind would chase it away, and the bright sunshine flash into every corner of the apartment, revealing the now delicate, almost ethereal, features of the sick man, and lighting up the rosary beads, spotless *cornette*, and poor habit of the gentle Sister, as she listened in rapt attention to the sad narrative of her patient.

"Keep your seat to-day, please ; don't withdraw into the corner as you did yesterday ; and if I

appear to get nervous or excited, do not be surprised or astonished. You see, I know some of the actors in this drama rather intimately."

"I understand"—with a comprehensive nod. "You were telling me that Harold and his mother had made up their minds that, by fair means or foul, he should have a share of his brother's inheritance."

"Yes, just that ; and when such people make up their minds to do a thing it requires a strong force to prevent them from achieving their object. In this case circumstances favoured them. A mind stronger and more crafty than theirs came to their assistance in the son of the family lawyer. He was a daring and unscrupulous rogue, such as I hope never to meet again ! But for him—but for his unceasing importunity and cunning advice—Harold would never have fallen as he did." As Manfred spoke his eyes had a wild expression in them, and he struck the bed-clothes with his doubled fists as though striking at a bitter enemy. "This wretch—this wily, clever knave—took a violent fancy to Harold, listened patiently to his version of the injustice and unfairness of existing circumstances, and enlarged so adroitly upon the subject that he actually persuaded the poor youth that Edmund was an interloper, possessing no real right to existence at all ; that but for him Harold himself would have been the only legitimate heir to the title and Abbey lands. How he persuaded Harold of the truth of all these representations I cannot now well remember. But, oh, how easily we can be induced to commit the foulest deeds if only we are certain

to profit by them ! To cut a long story short, all three young men were sent to Cambridge together, to complete their education ; Sir Henry consenting, after much persuasion on the part of the old lawyer and Mrs. Manly, to pay Harold's expenses.

“ From the time they were all placed upon an equal footing and launched on their own resources, as it were, the star of Edmund began to wane. He was no match for the others. Good-natured, unsuspicious, careless, how could he guess what evil genius dug the pits into which he was so constantly falling. He had no chance from the first. Who has when surrounded by bitter enemies, who all the while are playing the part of constant friends ? Was there a disgraceful row or dishonourable act into which he could be innocently beguiled, Edmund was always made the scapegoat ; and as he was proud to a fault, they played upon his weakness, knowing he would never betray a friend. Often Harold watched the fierce, proud glance of his eye and his haughty bearing as he turned away in disdain when confronted by a false accusation. Yes, he watched him, and envied him even more than before—longing even sometimes to acknowledge the fault, and thus spare another wound to the magnanimous young man. But no such chance was permitted him ; his evil genius stood at his elbow, and he dared neither speak nor act. He was already too deeply involved to retract. There was but one course open now : he and his accomplice must stick together and strike unmercifully if they would win their cause.”

A tear rolled down the soft flushed cheeks that

were bent so earnestly over her work. It flashed in the sunlight, then fell gently on to the sewing. Manfred observed it. It was a valued tribute to the memory of poor Edmund, and stirred the softest feelings in the sick man's heart, as he thought, "It is much better that she should sit where she is: following the lights and shades as they flit over her face eases my heart, and gives strength and nerve to my voice."

"Did Edmund never suspect the truth or fealty of his boasted friends? Did it never strike him that they were bent upon his ruin?"

"I think not. You see, he was far too honourable to doubt their assurances of friendship. I never really did know how it all occurred; but enormous bills were run up and sent to Sir Henry. Worse still, debts of honour, that is, gambling and betting debts, were laid upon his shoulders. Now, if there was one vice which more than another irritated the old baronet, it was gambling; and for the first time he began to lose confidence in his nephew.

"Things grew so bad that at the end of two years the young man was peremptorily recalled home; and, strange to say, there were not many who regretted his sudden departure. The character of Edmund was an enigma; he seemed to be a curious mixture of generosity and meanness, of honour and baseness, truthfulness and deceit; whereas Harold, though he was almost hated by his companions, stood high in the opinion of his tutor as a youth of unimpeachable morals and stout integrity."

“But surely Sir Henry discovered that half the things said of his nephew were false and unfounded?”

“No, he did not. I told you it was a long story, and that I could not enter into much detail; but, briefly, things went rapidly from bad to worse. Edmund resented—at first sorrowfully, then indignantly—his uncle’s changed manner towards him; and, finding himself wrongfully suspected, and even falsely accused of grave deeds of which he was entirely innocent, he grew desperate. He left his uncle’s roof, sought relief in dissipated pleasures and amusements, which, though they helped to dull the pain caused by his uncle’s unjust anger, failed to heal or satisfy his heart. To destroy Sir Henry’s confidence in his nephew Edmund, and to induce him to turn to Harold for comfort, were the objects sought after by these two false friends. Again circumstances favoured them. Thomas followed the unfortunate young man to the scenes of gaiety and amusement with which he sought to drown his injured pride, and aided him to plunge deeper and deeper into debt, taking care that Sir Henry should be kept well informed of all, and far more than all, that occurred. Meanwhile, Harold’s policy was to remain at home, apparently studying hard, and yet ever ready at Sir Henry’s beck and call.”

“Mean, miserable impostor! How could he act thus?” burst from the indignant lips of the listener.

“He was driven to it. He dared not refuse to play the part. Ah, of course you do not know what it is to be the tool, the slave, of a rascal.

But you waste your anger and indignation," he said coldly. "Rest content to know that poor Harold never won either Sir Henry's love or his confidence. Deep in the old man's heart lay the memory of his dead brother; and, stern as he strove to appear in his conduct towards that brother's son, he still loved him better far than anything else on earth. 'The boy has been spoiled, he is young and thoughtless,' he argued to himself; 'a little judicious severity will cure and win him back to steadier ways. He has, perhaps, built too much upon my forbearance and his own inheritance. These I will appear to withhold from him for a while. It will be a salutary lesson. Old Thomas shall inform him of my intentions. Poor dear boy! How I miss him!'

"Often in those days the old gentleman was almost unapproachable; he was aging rapidly, and was daily becoming more and more morose and irritable. Hour after hour he would lock himself up in his private den, upon the walls of which hung portraits of the two Edmunds, father and son; but how he occupied his time when thus alone no one ever exactly knew. Once, after being ensconced in his private sanctum for three solitary hours, he encountered Harold on the threshold, where the youth had been waiting in the hope of rendering Sir Henry some courtesy. Upon the furrowed cheeks of the elder man were distinct traces of tears; but perceiving Harold standing meekly, as if in attendance upon him, he glared at him fiercely. 'What are you doing here, you miserable, servile, grasping wretch?' he cried, and

lurching forward endeavoured to seize him. 'Go away! I don't want *you*. Never let me see you darken my doors again!'

"You are smiling, Sister Marguerite. You are pleased to think that Harold did not advance much in favour with the old baronet. Well, well! you may come to pity Harold yet!" There was a pause, but still the Sister said nothing. Then, in a voice filled rather with shame than spirit, Manfred resumed his story:

"Would that the remainder of the story might be blotted out; but, alas! I must force myself to relate it. I must tell it to the bitter end. Soon after the compact had been entered into by Harold and the younger Thomas—the compact, I mean, which bound them to stand by each other in this wretched business of ousting one brother and replacing him by the other—they were masters where before they had been as nonentities: at least Thomas was master; for Harold learned but too soon not only to fear and despise his ally, but to hate him also."

"What else could Harold expect? His fate was the certain portion of every one who sells himself to the Evil One. These two wicked youths were far more to be pitied than was poor Edmund."

"Wait a little," said Manfred in a trembling voice; "wait until you hear of all that occurred to him, and you may think differently then. He soon grew weary of the life of pleasure into which he had been driven; and hearing from the old lawyer (who must also have been in the toils of

his son) that Sir Henry was offended past reconciliation, and that Harold was to succeed to the estate, Edmund sold all he possessed, and with the proceeds in his pocket, and his painter's gear upon his shoulders, set out to earn his living by the work of his hands. He chose the mountains of Scotland as the first scene of his labours. One event of his tour I must tell you, for it played an important part in his career. In a cottage at the foot of a mountain he discovered Marion MacDermott."

The name had slipped from him in an unguarded moment, and had not Sister Marguerite suddenly started at the mention of it, he would have been quite unconscious of his indiscretion.

"Why did you start so, Sister?" he inquired, raising himself upon his elbows so as to get a clearer view of her features. She hurriedly excused herself, and he went on :

"This girl lived with her mother. Her father had lost money, and being gifted with great musical talent, had entered the profession in order to gain a livelihood for himself and his loved ones. Wishing to shield them from undue contact with the world into which this profession threw him, he bought and furnished a beautiful little cottage about two miles from a small town, and at the foot of one of his native mountains. In this sweet seclusion, for the greater part of the year at least, dwelt this lady and her daughter, the mother devoting herself to the education and bringing up of the girl."

"Was she pretty? was she good?"

"I never heard that she was beautiful, but refined and distinguished-looking. Her chief attraction was said to lie in the beauty and purity of her mind. She and her mother were Catholics, like yourself; they belonged to an ancient Catholic family."

"So Edmund was attracted by her—fell in love with her? Did he marry her?"

"Yes, he married her; but he did something still more hurtful to his interests—something which aided Harold and Thomas in their schemes more than anything he had yet done. You would never guess what was his final imprudence."

"Perhaps not. It is difficult to imagine him doing anything very wrong. But wait, I hear the *Angelus* bell," and down upon her knees fell the little nun; nor did she rise until she had breathed a fervent prayer for poor Marion MacDermot and all who were dear to her. Then she said quietly:

"Rest, and take your refreshment now; I have other duties to perform. All being well, you may resume your sorrowful tale this afternoon. Dear, dear!"—walking to the window—"how close sounds the roar of the cannon! It is terrible—terrible! Each hour it grows nearer and nearer. I was told that the troops were expected to enter the city by nightfall. If so, may God have mercy and spare His own; for these infuriated rebels will pause at nothing. Who knows which amongst us may be the next victim!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE sun had ceased to pour its rays in at the little casement. They were centred now upon that side of the cottage from which no window peeped ; so the small room looked more gloomy than it had done some hours previously, when with a heavy heart the Sister of Charity resumed her seat.

Alas, her heart and brain were in a turmoil of fear and alarm concerning the safety of Ma Sœur and her energetic community, to say nothing of the number of others for whose welfare she trembled. Twenty-four hours more of this terrible disorder must decide the fate of Paris : in the meantime what awful atrocities might not be perpetrated by its enemies, driven frantic as they would be by defeat and the fierce passions of hatred and revenge.

Almost mechanically she seated herself, and with a half-smothered sigh took up once more the neglected flannel garment, and endeavoured to concentrate her attention upon her present duty and forget her anxiety.

Manfred appeared not to apprehend any danger from the riot without. He knew he was far enough removed from the scene of it to have no immediate

cause for fear ; besides, was not Madame Corbette well known for a rabid Revolutionist ? Her cottage, then, was a secure refuge. At any rate, having travelled so far in his story, he felt compelled to finish it.

“ Shall I go on, Sister Marguerite ? ” he asked.

“ Are you prepared to listen ? ”

“ Yes, yes,” she answered, quickly, once more endeavouring to collect her thoughts. “ You were telling me that poor Edmund committed some awful act of folly.”

“ Yes, he did the very worst thing that he could then have done for himself and his prospects. He became a Catholic ! ”

“ Before he married Marion ? ”

“ Yes. And as soon as Sir Henry heard of this last misdemeanour he sent for him. There was a stormy interview. I believe the old man would have forgiven him everything—would have reinstated him gladly—had the young man but consented to relinquish Marion and this other new-fangled notion. As it was he looked upon his nephew as a renegade and a disgrace to his name. And after using every argument he could think of to turn the young man from this wild folly, the old baronet lost patience and bade him choose between his uncle’s love, with the Abbey lands as an inheritance, and poverty, with his new-fangled notions and Marion for his wife. Harold and Thomas, who were ensconced as conveniently near as they dared to be, overheard much of this conversation. They heard the sad pleadings of the old man and the firm and respectful, though foolish,

replies of Edmund, as he assured his uncle that even should death deprive him of his Marion, yet he would never relinquish the Faith he now loved better than his life. So, nerving himself to the utmost, Sir Henry arose and, walking towards the door with a firm step but bursting heart, opened it and bade his obstinate and misguided nephew begone. The hot tears rolled down Edmund's cheeks, for he dearly loved the stern old man, as humbly he crossed for the last time the threshold of his ancestors."

"Ah, believe me," interrupted the listener, "if he still lives, Heaven will yet come to his assistance. Where is the heart that ever suffered for, and trusted in, its God and was deceived?" Then folding her hands tightly together, she said in a low voice: "Poor Edmund, may God speedily have pity on you and aid you!"

"Amen," he muttered fervently to himself; and as if in answer to the prayer, an unfamiliar glow of charity stole over his heart and seemed to penetrate his secret soul. Yes, it was certainly easing his mind, it was doing him good, to tell her all this; surely she who was so wise, so full of resource, would be able to tell him how best to shift this weary burden from his mind, the weight of which had oftentimes well-nigh overwhelmed him. After a thoughtful pause he continued:

"A year passed, and in one way and another Edmund had contrived to save a little money. Marion's mother was dead, and her ailing father, desirous that his child should have a protector, gave his consent to an early wedding. By some

unknown means the knowledge of this fact came to the ears of Sir Henry, whose health, by the way, was fast breaking up. - He lived a very lonely life, and there were, I believe, hours when he blamed himself as having been too hard on Edmund's boy. A craving filled his heart to see, to be reconciled to, and bless him once more before he died. His physicians might try to hide the fact from him, but he knew too well that his days were numbered, that at any moment of undue strain or excitement the weak thread of his life might snap asunder; and what would become of the boy whom, in spite of all, he loved so well? No, they had both been punished enough; he would forgive him everything and reinstate the plucky fellow in his favour once more. But it must be done by degrees—yes, by degrees.

“Pacing the floor of his library with impatient steps he sent for the older lawyer, Thomas. A kindly smile played around the lips of the baronet that morning, his heart felt lighter than it had done for many a day. His mind was made up at last; he would restore his ill-guided but beloved nephew to favour; gradually should all be given back to the boy, even the unfortunate wife must be endured, for his sake.

“When the door opened and admitted young Thomas, instead of his father, a chill fell upon the spirits of Sir Henry. A stern expression chased the smile from his lips, while an ominous cloud of displeasure gathered on his brow; for, try as he might, he could not trust this clever son as he had ever been wont to trust the father. He turned

abruptly upon the young lawyer, and sternly demanded the reason why his father had not answered his summons in person ?

“Young Thomas, bowing deferentially, explained that his father was confined to his bed with rheumatism, that he had desired him to express his sincere regret to Sir Henry, and, at the same time, to assure him that if he would confide the business to his son, it should have his very best attention. There was no help for it ; the kindly flame still burned in Sir Henry’s heart, he would endeavour to overcome his prejudice to this young man, for the time being at least ; so desiring him to be seated, he plunged his hands into his trousers pockets, and, resuming his walk, launched into a declaration of all his plans regarding the future of Edmund. He would begin by sending the dear boy a wedding present of a thousand pounds ; and after the return of the young couple from their wedding tour he would invite them to the Abbey Towers for a visit of indefinite length ; but this latter portion of the programme must be kept a profound secret at present ; it should come upon them as a surprise just when Edmund was thinking of settling down to ill-paid drudgery again, in order to keep his wife, chuckled Sir Henry, as he rubbed his hands gleefully together.

“During the disclosure of these plans the young lawyer had gradually turned pale. During the pause which ensued he ventured, with a sickly smile, to force the inquiry : ‘Am I—are we to understand, then, Sir Henry, that you are about to reinstate Mr. Edmund at the Towers, with the

ultimate object of making him your sole heir?' 'Of course—that's just it!' answered the old man testily, turning his hawk-like glance upon the crest-fallen knave; 'and what is more,' he continued firmly, 'you can tell your father from me to destroy at once that bogus will which he and I concocted to frighten Edmund into compliance with my wishes—I mean that one in which I pretended to leave everything to his half-brother, Harold: tell your father to bring it here; I will destroy it myself and abide by the old one in which dear Edmund inherits everything; and Harold may look out for himself.' Finding that the young lawyer made no reply, Sir Henry moved a few steps nearer to him, and demanded in no very patient tone if he fully comprehended his meaning, or if it would be necessary for him to write or repeat his instructions.

"'I understand you perfectly, Sir Henry,' stammered Thomas rising; 'I was but thinking that surely all this will be somewhat rough upon Harold, seeing that he has been taught to believe—latterly at least—that you would do something—nay, a good deal—for him.'

"'Well, then, those who took upon themselves to bid him hope for what was never by any right or title his own, may comfort him now for the loss of what he never possessed. Stay one moment longer, Mr. Thomas; I will even now write a cheque for one thousand pounds on my city bank, payable to my nephew, and you shall take it to your father, who, I am sure, will forward it as a wedding-present. It must reach my nephew the

day after to-morrow. I will not send it directly from myself, but will wait a little and bide my time, until the first flush of billing and cooing is over. Then he will have more leisure in which to attend to his old uncle. Here is the cheque, and don't fail to tell your father about the will. I am in no immediate hurry; still, it is better to be on the safe side. However, I can trust him; he knows my ways, or ought to do by this time.'

"Almost staggering, young Thomas rose to depart. Were they then to lose everything, he reflected, just when all had seemed so nearly within their grasp; How pay his own pressing debts now? Edmund and his wife once installed at the Abbey Towers, little hope of a life of ease and comfort remained for him—nothing but hard work and small pay to look forward to. Was there nothing that could be done to lower Edmund once more in Sir Henry's eyes? Was all their past strategy to be thrown to the winds? Surely it would not take much to make the old gentleman lose confidence in his nephew again! Something must be done, and that at once, if they were to frustrate this mad scheme of Sir Henry's. At any rate, there was little to lose by the stroke, and much, much to gain! The old baronet's life was worth little now; a severe shock might make him change more than his mind. Oh, Sister Marguerite!" cried Manfred, stretching out his arm imploringly towards her, "believe me when I assure you that Harold knew not all this, nor the following facts, until they were accomplished. Thomas urged him to go to France on some

imaginary business for himself, but in reality that he might be out of the way. When he returned he found himself a prosecutor under Sir Henry's will—so, at least, it was represented him."

"And he tried to believe it, no doubt? But tell me, for I do not understand things rightly, did Edmund return to the Towers?"

"Never. But how can I explain it all to you? Briefly this is what occurred. Between the time of Edmund's receiving the cheque—which arrived upon the morning of the marriage—and the day on which he presented it at the bank, to be cashed and paid over to his account, the cheque had been tampered with. When Edmund handed it in it was for the sum of ten thousand pounds instead of one thousand, which was a decided overdraw on Sir Henry's account. The cheque was duly forwarded to him to confirm; and when he beheld it, the deceit which he believed to have been practised upon him by his nephew came upon him with such force that his remaining strength gave way, he lost consciousness, and never really recovered it for the two days that he lingered. But Thomas the younger made hay while he might. For two hours he was closeted with the old baronet on the day of his death, to receive, it was supposed, his last instructions; and when at last he issued from the room, he was armed with a paper which certainly bore the feeble signature of the baronet, and the contents of which meant worse than death to Edmund. It stated that Sir Henry believed¹ his nephew to have

committed forgery by tampering with the cheque, and that he desired that Harold should succeed to the title and estates. Furthermore, that the base conduct of Edmund should be taken up by the law, and treated as it deserved to be. How can I ever tell you how it all came about? Everything seemed left in the hands of the lawyers, the elder of whom was brought to believe that the young man was not only guilty of the crime, but was the indirect cause also of his poor uncle's death. He did not spare him, you may be sure of that."

"Did they seize him?" inquired the Sister, almost below her breath.

"They did, just as he and his bride of two days were taking their tickets for the Continent, where they purposed spending the remainder of their honeymoon."

"But why did not Edmund notice that the cheque had been altered before it was presented for payment?"

"He was always too careless about money matters; he swore, when questioned, that he had never touched nor looked at it again from the time he received it to the moment it was handed in to the bank, and yet to his knowledge it had never left his possession."

"Was there no one to come forward and plead his cause, and try to prove his innocence?"

"Yes, Mr. McDermot employed a clever counsel, and sadly impoverished himself in his endeavour to save the name of his daughter's husband from shame and ignominy. But it was all of no avail: the case for the prosecution was unusually clear;

every doubtful act in the young man's former life was raked up and exposed ; the bogus will was read, and it, together with Sir Henry's sad and sudden death, and the ban of his uncle's displeasure under which he was supposed to have lived—these, and a hundred other things, all told against him ; his case was hopeless. Besides, his health and spirits gave way ; and, breaking down altogether, he was completely unable to defend himself."

"And so was unjustly condemned by both his friends and his country—for he certainly never altered the cheque."

"Yes, he lost all his earthly possessions ; his wife, his good name ; and received in return a sentence of five years' penal servitude."

"My God !" exclaimed Sister Marguerite, rising abruptly, "he is perhaps suffering still ! Is this unjust sentence not yet completed ? And *you*—you live to say it ? You who know in your inmost heart that he always was innocent of this charge ! Oh, how can you bear to lie there and realize what he must now, even this very moment, be enduring, alone, isolated from his equals and those whom he loves, and treated by those beneath him as a felon—his youthful frame, perhaps, bent and weakened by cruel labour ; his brow bowed in shame and branded with the stigma of dishonour ; his kind heart crushed, nay, it may be, broken long ago, by months and years spent in weary waiting ! Why do you not rise and rescue him ? If you would hope for mercy yourself, hasten to save him !"

She paced the small apartment with quick and

nervous steps, and gasped as though for freer air. Then, turning suddenly upon him, she asked quickly :

“Where is this Harold—this shameless coward in whose heart lies hid this terrible secret? Why does he not come forward and confront that villain Thomas, and vindicate the honour of his brother’s name?”

“Alas, how can he do it? The old lawyer and his son have both gone to their account. I assure you, indeed, that it was not until just before the death of the latter that Harold learned the full truth of all these facts—that young Thomas himself had done the dishonourable act, bent, for reasons of his own, upon poor Edmund’s ruin.”

“Then, having learnt that, why did not Harold at once stand forth and proclaim his brother’s innocence?”

“Oh, be merciful in your judgments, Sister Marguerite. How could he do so?” demanded Manfred in tones of bitterness. Can you not understand that Thomas had so managed the affair that to clear Edmund’s name meant to implicate his brother’s? Both could not be free. If Harold dared to make the attempt, overwhelming evidence was there to implicate and condemn himself. What could he do but let things drift? Three years are already over, and Harold will atone to his brother by rendering him every possible assistance on his release from——”

“Atone!”—and with ringing scorn the word echoed through the room—“atone! Oh, base the heart to conceive the thought; and baser still the

lips to frame it ! Atone ! How can he atone to his innocent brother for the unnumbered wrongs he has wrought against him ? How heal the sickening pain of those weary hours, days, and months spent in a felon's cell ? How can he restore the fair name and build up once more to health and strength the manly form bowed down by meagre fare and cruel work ? How dry the bitter tears from the girl-bride's heart, or bid her cease to weep and mourn for her husband's sufferings and his tarnished name ? *No*, 'tis cowardly to breathe the word in that sense. Atonement must be meted even as was the injury—publicly—freely ! If not, believe me, the hour of Harold's retribution will arrive ; he cannot escape his punishment. Either here or hereafter it will overtake him ; then may God have pity upon him ! ”

She looked down upon him, the fire of indignation lighting her eyes. Writhing in agony of soul, and cringing in terror, Manfred gasped :

“ In mercy to poor Harold, say that there is hope for him yet. He has not enjoyed his ill-gotten goods—indeed he has not ! Wealth has not been his, for blackmailers have well-nigh ruined him. And as for happiness or peace of heart—God is my witness, he has never known them. ”

All feeling of pain in his injured limb seemed forgotten in the mental torture he was then enduring. His lips quivered and his hands shook with misery as he endeavoured to clutch the nun's hands ; as though the very contact with her would ensure for him the peace and safety he craved. But instinctively she raised them ; in her agitation

she had caught up her rosary beads and, without intention, had backed further from his reach. He noted the movement and caught the ring of distrust in her voice as she answered :

“Heaven and earth must bear witness to the sincerity of Harold’s repentance, ere he finds mercy.” Carried away by the vehemence of her nature, she had miscalculated his strength, nor taken into account the effect that all this agitation might have upon his frame, weakened by illness. Before her mental vision had risen the tear-stained, suffering face of Marion MacDermot, as she had poured forth this terrible story into the kind nun’s sympathetic ear, and her heart burnt with indignation at the thought that here before her lay the accomplice, if not the originator, of all that misery and shame. Further and further she moved from him. Then, as if all hope had departed from him for ever, as if the flood of despair, let loose, had overwhelmed him, Manfred turned, and with a groan fainted away.

With a startled cry the little Sister of Charity sprang to the side of her patient. She realised the full danger of the situation. She had been too hasty, too stern, towards the poor fallen creature before her, when he had sought mercy at her hands.

“My God, forgive me!” she cried as, falling upon her knees, she bowed her pale face in her hands and prayed. Alas, who was she that dared to sit in judgment upon a fellow-creature? What rough lessons of humility did she not yet need to subdue that proud spirit and calm the fiery im-

pulses of her nature! Would death but find her still a victim, never a conqueror! "Heaven forgive me," she cried again, "and sweet Mother of God come to mine aid."

But she must work and pray together. Seizing Manfred's clammy hand—her own were trembling visibly—she eagerly felt his pulse. There was hope yet; he might revive. Tenderly she bathed the weary temples, chafed the wasted hands, and forced drops of a powerful restorative between his lips.

"Sister Marguerite! Sister Marguerite!" rang out the shrill voice of Madame Corbette from the adjoining apartment; "hear you not the clamour? My old spirit is stirred and warms within me at the sound of war. We shall be conquerors yet! I know it well. The Reds are to the fore!"

"Yes, yes; I hear—God help them all," answered the agitated Sister. Little heeded she now all the noise without; but one thought, one fear, was in her mind. Had she, unwittingly, hastened the presence of a despairing fellow-creature before the dread Tribunal? How she racked her brain in the endeavour to discover some remedy that perchance in her excitement she had omitted. Her life would be but a small ransom to offer in exchange for his soul; and how gladly would she make the sacrifice! If only Heaven would restore him to life, how she would speak to him of the goodness and mercy of God, and endeavour to win him to repentance.

And Heaven was kind to her.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was after a weary time of anxiety had elapsed for the Sister that Manfred once more opened his eyes, listened strangely for a while, then inquired feebly :

“What is the matter? What has happened? Why are you kneeling there, Sister Marguerite, with the crucifix clasped to your heart and the tears dimming your eyes? Are we in danger from without?”

“No”—rising quickly—“I am but pouring out my heart in gratitude to God for a great favour that He has granted to one whose hateful pride rendered her unworthy of it.”

“Ah, I know now; I remember it all!” And an expression of pain passed over his pallid features. “You—you said that Harold’s sin was almost too great to be forgiven!”

“No, no! I was severe, hard, but I did not say that. Believe me, that were poor Harold’s sin multiplied ten times over, yet it would not compare with the unlimited mercy of God. Harold has but to seek for pardon, and he will obtain it.”

“But,” he hesitated, “he must—surely he must make restitution?”

“Hush!—even that he will do, nobly, generously.” And she laid her hand upon his brow. “Do not talk more now, but I know, I feel that Harold will do his duty. Rest at least for a while; forget your troubles, lay them with confidence at the foot of the Cross; and whilst you sleep I will keep watch, and pray for you.”

“Pray for me! Do you then pray for *me*, Sister Marguerite? How beautiful! One thing I have often longed to ask you for, but dared not do so; give me your crucifix, let me kiss it. Often I have scoffed and jeered at the sacred emblem, but now, for the love of Him who hung thereon, let me kiss it once.”

She handed it to him, and after pressing his lips reverently to the foot of it, he looked up with a sweeter smile than she had yet seen him wear, and asked in a pleading voice:

“Do not condemn me to silence. I am feeling better—much better. I have still something to relate—something which must be told; but since hope is once more dawning within me, it will not be so hard a task. Are you too weary to listen longer, or may I ease my heart and tell you?”

“You may do just as you wish, only do not overtax your strength anew.”

“It is about the poor wife, Marion. After losing her husband she nursed her father with tenderest care until he died; and when Harold would have sought for and aided her, like another, she disappeared from his sight, leaving no trace of her whereabouts.”

“I fear you are but a sorry searcher,” was the

smiling reply. "Have you no idea now of her whereabouts."

"Strange to say, a few months ago I almost miraculously lighted upon what must be her lair."

"You? You did? Oh, tell me where and how."

"It happened thus." (It gave him pleasure to see her so interested.)

"I was a guest at one of England's lordly homes. Ah! if only you, who so admire the works of God's creation, had but known what it was to live and breathe in such an atmosphere of refinement and elegance; to ramble at will amidst the luxuriant foliage and artistic beauties of the ancient home and park of which I speak; your poetic nature would have been so enthralled therewith, that not even the exalted life you now lead—and to which you appear so devoted—could have had the power to charm you from such an existence."

"Nay," laughing outright, "in that now you surely do me wrong. If choice there must be, who would not willingly barter the fleeting things of time for the lasting goods of eternity! For, listen! The stateliest castle that ever was reared will assuredly crumble to ruin. Not so the mansions of Heaven, they will flourish and continue for ever. Earth's proudest names—save those of God's saints—are but a faded memory of the past. Scarce are their owners buried ere others usurp their place and they lie forgotten. Not so the memory of the blessed. Day by day we salute them with loving words, and greet with joy their festivals, pondering deeply the glorious example of

virtue they left behind. Nature is beautiful ! most glorious indeed ! and yet the noblest forest tree must decay, bend, and fall. Earth's fairest flowers wither and fade ; not so the mighty standard of the Cross, or the martyr's palms. *They* will flourish and thrive for all eternity. But, not to weary you, pray tell me where in this drear old world of ours is this beautiful Eden, this garden of Paradise in which the daughters of Eve are to be held captive by its charms, even against their will?"

"You never tire me. I love to hear you talk, but the time of your departure creeps on apace, and I *must* finish my story. The Eden of which I speak is in one of our Southern counties. It is the beautiful home of the De Woodville family, and known as Baron Court."

Though listening for the name breathlessly, she actually trembled as he pronounced the words. It seemed so odd to hear the dear familiar names uttered in this far-off cottage, and by a stranger's lips. A full minute elapsed ere she could so still the beatings of her heart, so calm the tell-tale quivering of her voice, as to venture a further question. Then, in as indifferent a tone as she could assume, she inquired, "Do you then know this Earl? Are you a friend of his?"

"No. For entirely private reasons—in fact, to seek a lost trail—I procured an invitation to make one of a shooting party through a friend of mine who is his cousin. We were to have spent some weeks at the Court, but, unfortunately, I was compelled to leave suddenly."

"Doubtless Lord de Woodville is married?"

Did you see his wife?" she asked in a strange, unnatural voice.

"No, they were both away from home at the time, but I heard her spoken of as a sweet little woman; and if she resembles her portrait, which hangs side by side with her mother's in the gallery, she is as pretty as she is sweet. Of Irish extraction I believe she is." It amused him to discover this trait of feminine curiosity in the nun's character. He smiled a superior smile.

"Of the pictures one rivited my attention even to fascination, and aroused my envy. It was of three girls. There was something in the face of each subject—a simple purity, a look of innocence, and yet a depth of soul—that suggested a likeness between them. It bore the title, 'The United Kingdom.' The centre figure, which represented England, was that of a lovely girl, graceful as a nymph, attired in white; a single rose decked her gold-brown hair; lilies lay upon her youthful breast, and grew about her feet. A sweet emblem of purity thus she stood, but from her eyes there gleamed a lofty spirit, as pure as it was bold. On her right, her little hand fast locked in England's, seated on an ivy stump, rested Ireland's gentle daughter, dressed in emerald green. The shamrock wreath crowned her dark and wavy locks; modesty peace, and beauty dwelt in the drooping eyes and on the broad white brow. On the mossy grass beside these two, the hand of England resting lovingly on her neck, knelt Scotland's child, attired in richest plaid. The purple thistle decked her chest-

nut hair ; steadfast and true the light that shone from her brave eyes."

The blood had rushed to Sister Marguerite's face, and suffused it with a rich crimson glow ; for well did she remember how her brother had insisted upon having the picture painted before she left her home for ever. How clearly had her patient suggested the portraits of dear Marie and Madge ; the thought of them was dearer to her now almost than ever.

"Surely you are not well ?" inquired Manfred, noting her flushed and downcast face.

"Oh, yes, but perhaps the room is a little close," she answered, rising and moving towards the window, which she threw more widely open. "The air will soon revive me." There was a slight pause, during which the cool fresh air played gratefully upon her burning cheek, and helped to calm her mind.

"At this Baron Court of which you speak, saw you aught of an old dog—or servants—retainers grown old in their master's service. Oftentimes such places possess these faithful treasures."

"And true enough this one lacked not its due in that respect. Few *young* faces were there to grace the servants' hall ; whilst one huge St. Bernard paced with stately tread the most private garden walk. There was one old man especially, who loved the dog, and seldom lost him from his sight ; this was John, the aged coachman, quick-witted, but too presumptuous and bold ; to speak the truth, I cared little for either man or dog, nor did I trust them either."

The friendly *cornette* hid her face; it was well her back was turned, for a look of triumph lit her eyes as she thought within herself, "Dear old Leo! you never failed to chose the brave and true!"

"Was the dog very old and infirm, or likely, do you think, to live a few years longer? Being fond of animals, I like to hear all about them."

"Really, I bestowed very little attention upon the animal. We took a mutual dislike to each other. But why do you take such interest in unnecessary things? It is not of dogs or men I wish to speak, but of Marion, poor Edmund's wife. The rest has no concern for us."

"Well, I am once more all attention," she said presently, as she turned from the window and patiently reseated herself. "What of Marion? Did you see her?"

"No, I did not; but chance threw me across the Western Lodge, into which, with the coachman's aid, we entered, the owner being from home. Curiosity persuaded me to explore the dainty cottage, and there, hidden in a private room, I saw poor Edmund's portrait, and hanging on the walls were pictures of Scottish scenery, in which I recognised his touch. His violin—a 'Strad'—was there also; everything spoke of him. I fairly gasped for breath. Never had I felt so near to him as then. Scarce dare I move or breathe lest face to face I'd meet him. I feigned sudden illness and rushed out from the door, thankful to make my escape at any cost. Nothing could have induced me to linger near the spot; so you see

that even *this* beautiful Eden held for me its avenging angel, and in dread of it I fled."

"It would surely have been more dignified and manly—as Harold's friend—had you remained to aid poor Edmund's wife?"

"Yes; now by the new light which is gradually penetrating my mind, I see how insane and cowardly was my flight. But since my panic drove me here, the hand of Providence may have been the motive power; for some little time ago a secret impulse seemed to promise me peace of heart once more, could I but unburden my soul to *you*."

"And have you been true to that impulse by unfolding to me *all*, simply and plainly—every fact?"

"Not quite all; one thing of importance alone remains. I am afraid and ashamed to tell you that to-night; to-morrow, on your return, I will humble myself still further, and you, dear kind Sister, will then talk to me and teach me how to act."

And thus, like many a better man, Manfred deferred the essential and, to his mind, most humiliating act. To-morrow would be soon enough to tell her who he was: he could not force himself to act to-day. He could not foresee all that was to happen—all the terrible atrocities that were to be perpetrated between the setting and the rising of the sun. He knew not that the next time he should gaze upon the sweet features of his gentle nurse his own would be so distorted with fear as to be scarcely recognisable. Few of the inhabitants of the city of Paris closed their

eyes during the hours of that awful night, when the Communists had sworn that where they could not conquer they would destroy and reduce to ashes.

"Only one question more ere I bid you farewell," said Sister Marguerite. You have never told me Edmund's family name. His poor little wife, you say, still bears her maiden name of MacDermot; what is that to which she has a right? I mean the name of her ill-used husband; for, indeed, so I may call him, seeing all he has endured."

"To-morrow, dear kind Sister, I will tell you all: but you must promise not to be too severe, or you will kill me outright."

"I do promise!" she said, with her sweetest smile, "for to-day I have received a lesson which I trust never to forget. A few more such," she added brightly, "and the proud spirit of Sister Marguerite will be subdued, please God, at last."

"Must you really go?" he cried nervously, as he listened to her rehearsing her last instructions for the night to Jeanne, who had already been waiting ten minutes to take her place. "I feel unstrung to-night: the noises outside alarm me; you must not face it alone. Stay with us—do stay, Sister Marguerite, I entreat you!"

"Now I am ashamed of my patient," she said merrily, in feigned anger. "Why should you fear for my safety more to-night than at any other time? He who protects the birds of the air will surely cast His loving care o'er His little spouse; and if a stray shot should hit me—well, it would only be one Sister of Charity less: that to many

would appear a boon and no loss, you know ! Only one of those horrid white *cornettes* the less," she laughed mischievously. But seeing a look of pain and self-reproach upon Manfred's face, she stepped quickly to his side and, handing him her crucifix, knelt beside his couch, saying :

"Take this in your hand, and repeat after me what I say ; you will feel better for doing so : ' My God, I believe in Thee, I hope in Thee, and I love Thee, and from the bottom of my heart I grieve for all my offences against Thee.' There"—rising—"now if you are kept awake by fear and terror, repeat that little prayer, and all will be well." And with a kindly "God bless you all," she was gone.

Manfred heard the cottage door close after her ; then with a heavy sigh he buried his head on his pillow and wept tears of sorrow—sorrow for the miserable and sinful life he had led, sorrow for the grief he had caused others ; and, most of all, he wept for very shame as he realised the almost immeasurable distance that existed between him and the once despised little Sister of Charity to whom, under God, he owed his life.

CHAPTER XIV.

It is an acknowledged fact that to authors are accorded privileges which assuredly are denied to ordinary mortals, and amongst the most startling of them is the marvellous power and speed wherewith they whirl their kind and patient readers from one half of the hemisphere to the other. No sooner have they secured our sympathy and impressed us with the surroundings of a fellow-creature dwelling in the heart of a crowded city, than with a dexterous twist of the pen they have landed us in the centre of the most distant and silent solitude of the desert. Or, from the summit of some snow-capped mountain peak, they alight with ease and grace upon the white deck of some proud steamer battling hopelessly with the cruel breakers. There appears to be no limit to the magic power of the pen. A few inspired words culled from the mind of a saint, are able to fill our hearts with peace and joy and raise our souls to higher and better things, just as those drawn from the opposite source may pollute and defile us, almost to the level of the brute beast. No motive power will ever be discovered, able to stir and urge our bodies forward with anything like the velocity of speed wherewith that of the magic pen can force our minds

hither and thither, above and below, through the past into the future, until we are almost lost to the things of the present. And now with quiet noiseless tread and reverent mien, I too would be bold and lead my readers—even as the angelic guide did the great St. Peter—through bolts and bars and prison walls, nor pause for breath or speech until I land them safely within the narrow confines of a dim and dreary cell.

No sound was here save the dull, monotonous tread of the jailer, as he paced the silent passages, peering every now and again through the small iron grid let into each prison door. Yet the same sun which rode high over restless Paris, dazzling the eyes of Sister Marguerite as she listened to her patient's tale, shone also upon the ugly roof and bare walls of a convict prison, and pierced the iron bars let into the cold grey wall. They fell with a welcome warmth, and seemed to linger about the form of the occupant of a certain cell, who, though worn by toil and disfigured by the prison garb, still struck the eye and filled the heart with interest and pity.

It would have been difficult to guess his age just then, for he was seated upon the regulation stool, one toil-stained hand hanging listlessly by his side, the other resting upon his knee and supporting his handsome head, with its clearly cut features. There was nothing to distinguish this cell from the others; the hard mattress and the blanket lay tightly rolled up in one corner, whilst the rough wooden stand which supported the tin jug and basin added but little comfort to the place. But no visitor

gazing upon its occupant could fail to be impressed by a sensation of wonder. Some there were amongst them who, animated by kinder feelings than curiosity, crossed the threshold of the strong iron-bound door to examine more closely the surroundings of so interesting a prisoner. And such as these oft-times left that cell more deeply moved than they could well have explained; a halo of romance and mystery hung over the lonely, silent man.

Like the illustrious but ill-fated Philip Howard, Edmund Leadbitter had, by the aid of an old rusty nail, traced in the stone of his prison wall words which proved the height and depth of an exalted nature, and accounted in some measure for the steady eye which was never bent or lowered in shame before his fellow-creatures. In one corner of this darksome abode—that in which the light fell least, as though a longing for privacy had guided the artist's hand—was traced with no little skill the outline of a crucifix, and beneath it the words: "Even should He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Then, as though the mind had wandered to familiar scenes fast burnt into the brain, and guided and given strength and nerve to the powerful hand, the nail had traversed the wall once more, leaving in its masterful trail the graceful outlines of a ruined abbey.

A harder month's labour than usual had just been accomplished by the convicts; but the health of several of them, notably that of Edmund Leadbitter, or of "No. 75," had gradually succumbed under the extra strain, and after having fainted

twice in the forenoon, he had been conducted back to his cell to rest a little, in order to be ready for the next day, when the services of every available man would be required to assist at some important work in the quarries. But No. 75 was not alone. One who sympathised with him much more than he dared express was near him, endeavouring to comfort and aid the unfortunate man. Leaning against the wall opposite, looking upon the convict with eyes in which pity and admiration strove for mastery, stood a Capuchin Father, dressed in the familiar brown habit and white cord of St. Francis : he was one of the chaplains to the prison. Apparently they had been conversing for some time, for No. 75, looking up with a pleasant smile, remarked in a refined voice :

“It is discourteous of me, Father, to permit you to stand whilst I sit here resting all the while.”

“You know well enough that I shall never permit you to stand one instant longer than you must. The state of your health troubles me. Why do you object to my calling the attention of the doctor to your case? Why will you persist in making so light of your sufferings, when with a little trouble on my part I could obtain an order for your admittance into the infirmary at once?”

“After to-morrow, dear Father—after to-morrow. Grant me yet one day more ere I give in ; then you may do as you will. Only one day more—surely I can stand that !” and the honest eyes looked up at the priest with a strange entreaty.

Father Lawrence lowered his own, for the look cut him to the heart ; he longed to evade it, but it

haunted him long afterwards to the destruction of his peace of mind. Accustomed to the presence of vice in all its forms, in the prisoner before him he had discovered such magnanimity as he could not but reverence. Thoughtfully stroking his brown beard with one hand, whilst with the other he held the beads at his side, Father Lawrence at last inquired :

“Why ‘to-morrow’ again? For the last week it has been the same cry. When to-morrow comes you will still plead for twenty-four hours more of harder labour than you can endure. Do you want to die at your post?”

“Not to die, Father! It is not that I may be overworked and die that I ask more time. Believe me, there is no one in all this wretched abode who courts death less than I, or who fears it more. No! But though men may fetter the limbs, and bow the body down, yet no earthly power can fetter or cripple the spirit of man when in unison with the will of his Creator. Be patient with me yet a little longer; for hope burns bright within me, and I will not stifle it. This coarse shirt”—holding it between his fingers—“with its ornamental design of ill-shaped arrows, shall yet give place to a softer garment. These horny hands shall be soft and white as of old; and casting aside the pick and spade, shall ply with joy the pencil and brush, and draw forth sweet music from a loved old instrument. Fear not for me, then, Father, nor seek to sadden me with baseless apprehensions; rather bid me have courage, and remember that no heart ever yet trusted its God in vain.”

Father Lawrence felt himself once more baffled. He knew well that hope and faith in God alone had sustained the strong spirit before him, and yet he was aware that the poor prisoner's frame was so weak that any undue bodily exertion might easily prove fatal ; therefore he paused ere he answered as cheerfully as he could :

"At least you will allow me to ask a day off for you to-morrow. I hear that water has burst into one of the quarries, and the work will be both heavy and dangerous. You cannot object to one day's rest, when you know it to be so essential for your health."

The prisoner bowed his head still lower ; he did not wish to meet the kind eyes of his friend ; and answered with slow, indomitable persistency : "After to-morrow, dear Father—after to-morrow ; then I promise to listen to and comply with your every request. Ah, you do not realise how sweet it is to me to feel the free air of Heaven upon my brow. You have not felt what joy it is to gaze upon the faces of your fellow-creatures, to mark the pure innocent look of the children, and to note the pitiful eyes of the women as they fall upon you, and to be able to bless God that they, at least, are still free and unfettered. And Father," continued the man, burying his face in his hands. "since you will have my reason (which, however, remember, is sacred between us), there is just a chance that on the way to or from the mines to-morrow I may catch a passing glimpse of features that are dearer to me than aught else on earth. I have waited so long, almost a year now, yearning for the sight once again ; you

cannot deny me just one more trial. To-morrow is the anniversary of our wedding-day, and I feel certain that my wife will be somewhere near on that day."

With difficulty Father Lawrence forced back the tears that welled to his eyes. Why had he been placed in such a position as chaplain to his poor imprisoned fellow-creatures, to some of whom his heart went out in such overwhelming pity and compassion that he had often no power to eat or sleep? Now, however, he felt that the conversation was taking a dangerous turn; he must not connive at any act contrary to prison rules. Besides, the excitement of it was telling upon the weak frame of poor No. 75; he was breathing too fast and heavily, and the perspiration was standing upon his brow. Moving towards him the priest laid his hand firmly upon his shoulder, saying in an abrupt voice, as though the better to recall the man to himself:

"Answer me one question. You have already recounted to me so many details of your history that I seem to know it almost better than my own. But rouse up now for a moment and endeavour to recall to your mind if any one visited your apartments during the time you had that wretched cheque in your possession."

"How strange!" exclaimed the prisoner, looking up suddenly. "How strange that you should have hit upon the very keynote to the whole mystery! And yet, what is stranger still, is the fact that at my wretched trial all remembrance of the circumstance had left me. Indeed, the terrible suddenness of the whole tragedy upset my health

so seriously that for the time being my mind became a complete blank ; so that in my endeavour to aid my defence I did but involve myself the deeper."

"Yes, I remember well that for a long time after your entrance here you were too ill to leave the infirmary ; but now calm yourself for a moment and endeavour to recall to your mind who it was that visited your apartments, and at what hour of the day or night this visit took place."

The prisoner crossed his legs, clasped his thin hands around his knees, and looking steadily in front of him, answered calmly :

"One evening, the second after my marriage, I took my wife to see a play of Shakespeare's, and on my return my old landlady informed me that during our absence a young man had called, wishing to see me on urgent business regarding my half-brother. At the same time he pleaded fatigue, and begged to be allowed to rest a little and wait for us. Good-naturedly enough she consented, and begged him to take a seat in my sitting-room, which opened into the bedroom. In about twenty minutes he came out, and after thanking her for her kindness, said he really could not wait any longer, but, if possible, would call again the next day to see me."

"Had you the cheque in your own possession that evening?"

"No. With my usual carelessness I had left it enclosed in my pocket-book in my morning coat."

"And who was the visitor? Were you able to recognise him from the description given of him by the landlady?"

“My thoughts were so happy and pre-occupied at the time that I paid little heed to the fact of his calling at all ; but later, in my hours of dreary solitude, all she said has returned distinctly to my mind, and now I see it all.”

“And whom do you conclude it to have been ?”

“My one enemy, and my poor brother’s evil genius ; no other than young Thomas, the lawyer’s son.”

“But why was not the fact of this visit brought forward at the time of the trial ? Your defence ought to have made much of it. Where was the landlady ?”

“Ah, you see, Father, everything went dead against me, as you know by reading over a copy of the trial. The very day after this mysterious visit my landlady fell in the street and received a concussion of the brain ; this was followed by a long illness. In fact, I have often wondered whether she ever recovered. She was a kind, motherly old soul, but very simple.”

“I suppose you have forgotten her name and address ?” inquired the priest carelessly.

“No, it was Mrs. Lawson, King’s Street, W. The number I am not positive about, but think it was 17.” Father Lawrence drew from his pocket an old envelope, and after jotting down the address replaced it carefully. At this juncture the jailer slid back the panel and peered in, reminding the priest in a gruff voice that it was getting late.

“All right,” he answered cheerfully ; but continued in a hurried tone, “Do you think that your brother was cognisant of this man’s visit ?” No. 75

hesitated ere he answered ; then looking up sorrowfully, in a slow, steady voice he said :

“I would give much to think that my brother is innocent—but no ! I am certain he knew that his friend had altered the cheque. ‘They were both filled with envy towards me, and were determined, if possible, to share my uncle’s estate. No, Father ; I am morally certain that I am here with my brother’s connivance.’”

Father Lawrence heaved a sigh. He was convinced of the innocence of the man before him and of the truth of his statement, and yet what could he do ? It was almost beyond his power to refrain from crying out against the injustice of the case. How, he thought, could the poor prisoner exist through two years more of this suffering. Look at it as he would, from no point of view could he discern one ray of hope for the long-suffering, innocent man, for his country had found him guilty, and the judge had coincided in the view, condemning him as a criminal. “How frail and erring are human judgments after all,” he pondered. “Alas, I see nothing upon earth whereupon to rest. Like the courageous example before me I must place unbounded confidence in the mercy of Heaven.”

Once more the tramp-tramp of the jailer was heard on his return journey ; and after an earnest entreaty that the prisoner would take as much care of himself as he could, by endeavouring to swallow his untempting allowance and resting well during the night, the priest departed.

CHAPTER XV.

It was late before Father Lawrence reached his humble abode. After parting hastily from the poor prisoner, he left the prison and walked he scarcely knew whither, not noticing even the friendly salutes of the passers-by as they recognised his familiar figure. With head bent forward, eyes lowered upon the ground, and hands buried in the sleeves of his habit, he strode on, his mind perplexed by anxious thought. He had walked several miles ere he realised the lateness of the hour and the distance he had traversed. Arriving at last at his house, he mechanically drew forth his latch-key, opened the door, and passed at once to his small sitting-room.

The town lay well behind, for the church and house were built by a lane off from the high road. The room was in darkness but for the pale light of the moon. Not even noticing the cold supper which lay spread upon the table, Father Lawrence threw himself wearily into an armchair which stood facing the open, uncurtained window; then crossing his legs and throwing his arms behind his head continued his painful reverie. Before him, clearly defined in the moonlight, he could see the well-kept paddocks fenced round by low, thick

hedges in their first spring beauty ; the giant trees like solemn sentinels moved stiffly in salutation as it were to the night breeze, as it swept amid their branches, rustling playfully their fresh green leaves. The birds had long since ceased their noisy twitter ; the cattle and sheep were lying half buried in the soft green meadows, so full now of closed daisies and buttercups. The voices of the children were hushed : all nature seemed at rest, save the heart of the silent watcher. In the blue vault above the stars shone like myriads of twinkling diamonds, whilst the moon—her pale light unobstructed by the passage of clouds—looked peacefully down upon this world of ours, where virtue and vice are so strangely blended.

He knew that soon her gentle beams would pass through the window of that prison cell, and would linger over the features of that innocent man : where would she shine at the same hour upon the guilty brother, he wondered ? Where was he hiding ? How could he be found ?

How often, whilst sitting thus in solitude thinking of our absent ones, the longing seizes our hearts, that power were given us to pierce the distance which separates us from our loved ones, and feast our eyes—if only for an instant—upon their dear faces, and see how they fare. We feel that our rest and sleep would be more secure and perfect could we but know that they are well. Yet it is surely better for us that a kind Providence has blinded our eyes and bid us trust ourselves and them to Him. It is a thousand mercies we cannot see our heroes fall on the field of battle, or gaze upon

brave men struggling vainly with the cruel elements ; for, realising our own inability to help them, how could we endure the sight and live ? No ; things are best as God has planned them. And yet, as we watch the sun or the moon, as they pursue their steady course through the heavens, or listen to the gay, boisterous wind, as it hurries and scurries along, we catch ourselves vainly longing that, like those great orbs, power might be given us, just to have *one* wee peep at our dear ones—whose faces we have not seen for years—or that the fitful wind would pick up and bear to us, as it passes, the sweet sound of voices which for ages we have listened for in vain.

Some such wish as this was paramount in Father Lawrence's heart. He longed that a ray of this pale moonlight would reveal to him the exact hiding-place of the guilty brother. And yet, had it done so, what would have been his feelings ? What would he have thought, could he have peered, as a moonbeam was then struggling to do, into that small latticed window outside the walls of the city of Paris, and discovered—stretched on a bed of pain and suffering—the very man whom his heart was at that moment condemning. Surely, also, he would have turned away more bewildered than ever, had power been given him to glance yet again—as the moon did—through a small oriel window in a convent, and there, amidst all the noise and confusion reigning around, have caught the fervent words of prayer as they fell from the lips of a little Sister of Charity, and have detected in almost every sentence the name of the very prisoner for

whom his own heart was then aching so sorely. Mercifully, again all this was hidden from his eyes ; for, had he seen all that was to occur on that fatal night, and felt powerless to aid, hope might well-nigh have been extinguished within him.

So, unconscious of the flight of time and of the chilly night air, Father Lawrence sat busied with troubled cogitations. Sometimes he clasped his hands tightly together and looked sternly out into the night ; then, leaning his elbows upon a small table near, he would rest his chin upon his hands, still thinking—thinking.

“ It is impossible that the man can stand two years more of hard prison life,” he pondered. “ My God,” he cried, “ he cannot do it, and he will die and be buried in a felon’s grave!—the sainted prisoner whom I have learned to love almost as a dear brother.” The cool night air blew gratefully on the priest’s heated brow as he ran his fingers hastily through his thin brown hair. Was it impossible that any honest man could be found to come forward in the name of justice and lend a helping hand in this good cause. He could think of no one to whom he could turn for aid or advice. Would they not all smile and tell him that they had listened to many such tales before ; that men of his stamp and calling were too susceptible, too easily gulled ; that a jury did not often err when they condemned a man ; and so on ? Then his thoughts flew to the little bride-wife as the words of the prisoner recurred to his mind : “ To-morrow is the anniversary of our wedding-day, and I am

certain my wife will be somewhere near on that day." "Where would she be? how contrive to see her husband?" he wondered. "Ah, I will watch the prisoners on their walk to and from the quarries, and see if I can detect anything out of the common. Evidently it is not the first time that they have thus met. Poor, faithful little wife! No one shall prevent me from comforting her at least."

Thus planning, brooding, hoping, and fearing, he still sat until the clear sweet tones of a nightingale suddenly filled the night air with melody. As a harbinger of hope the thrilling notes struck upon the ear of the watcher and roused him from his reverie. Rising hastily, he pushed back his chair and stood listening; then with a feeling akin to hope and gratitude in his heart he reluctantly drew down the window, and discovered that he was both faint and hungry. The little room was flooded with moonlight, and taking out his watch Father Lawrence found that it still wanted sixteen minutes to twelve.

A very few moments sufficed in which to appease the inner man; then, feeling it useless to seek his couch, he opened the door and groped his way to the silent church.

And all the while the object of so much care and solicitude was resting upon his hard prison couch, sleeping the calm sleep of the innocent. And surely Heaven's angels hovered near, and with protecting love fanned his weary cheek and aching brow, building up in his heart bright hopes for the morrow. For he smiled as the

gentle moonbeams kissed his brow, the hard deep lines formed by toil and care seemed smoothed away, and in their place a look of almost youthful grace played around his mouth.

Thus the two brothers lay on their separate couches that memorable night. Near the side of one, though he had given his heart's blood to win her, still reluctant and unwilling, stood "Renown." Ever and anon she advanced, then mournfully withdrew. How could she crown the brow with valour, and leave exposed a coward's heart? But hanging over the bed of the other—whom men had condemned as worthless and unworthy—hung her sister, "Honour." Fondly she bent over the patient prisoner, and proudly she kissed his careworn brow, pouring into his heart the while the sweetest balm of hope. He forgot that he rested on a hard prison floor, that he was girt around by walls so thick, no friend could hear his call. For in his dreams he saw his uncle's face beaming upon him with deep and pitying love, and his heart leapt within him as a gentle voice whispered: "Fear not, there is One who counts your every sigh. Patience yet a *little* longer; not always shall you linger thus!"

CHAPTER XVI.

WHILST Father Lawrence was pacing the roads, his mind in a turmoil of perplexity and doubt, whilst Sister Marguerite was speaking of hope and repentance to her suffering patient, another scene was being enacted, which, though quite trivial in itself, bore strongly upon our present narrative. Just as the great stable clock, in solemn tones, announced the hour of seven, there issued from the door of the quiet Western Lodge at Baron Court the form of a woman, closely enveloped in a long dark cloak which entirely covered her figure, leaving exposed only her head, upon which she wore a small, closely-fitting black bonnet secured by white ribbons. A long black gauze veil hung over her features and concealed them, but when allowed to fall back into its proper position, together with the deep white collar and cuffs which encircled her neck and wrists, gave her much the appearance of the ordinary hospital nurse.

Locking the door securely behind her and putting the key safely in her pocket, she paused on the little garden path and looked fondly around. If there was one thing she loved to linger over, tend, and watch, it was her garden; and soon—in a few weeks—it would be a pleasant picture indeed

to gaze upon. It was only May, but Nature had called forth the green buds early that year, and this was a sunny sheltered nook. Was there one rose-bud, she wondered, sufficiently defined to pluck? She stooped over her favourite tree and raised the branches, looking at them proudly and tenderly; to her joy, she found one just bursting through its green envelope. This she carefully plucked, and after pressing it to her lips in memory of bygone days, and murmuring to herself, "I was ever his sweet mountain rose," she placed it, with a deep sigh, in the front of her dress beneath her cloak. Innocent little rose! Though the wearer knows it not, you have your mission to fulfil; you shall carry to a captive heart a message of true love, strong hope, and faithful endurance.

Then Marion MacDermot walked through the little gate, and drawing it securely to, turned and looked once more at her home. She would not be long absent from it, she thought; "and Heaven aid and strengthen me for the task before me," she prayed, "and bring me safely back to work for him."

After glancing once or twice furtively around, she passed through the larger and private gate and bent her steps along the high road leading towards the village of Oakhome. One more look around, to assure herself that no one was watching her movements, then adjusting the small hand-bag which she carried, and drawing on her black silk gloves, she held her veil securely down, and with a quick, light step, but with fluttering heart, passed on her way.

Since the day upon which Earl de Woodville—then Lord Grantheuse—had first driven the shy blushing school-girl, Marie Blake, now his dear little wife, to his paternal home at Baron Court, the steam locomotive had, with its usual indifference to the ancient and beautiful, forced its way into the very heart of the seclusion of Oakhome; and a small neat station had risen up in its midst, to which Marion was now wending her way.

It was growing dusk as she hurriedly mounted the steps leading to the upper portion of the station, after having secured her first-class ticket at the office below, and there paced wearily up and down until the train should come into view.

So engrossed was she in her own thoughts that she failed to observe that she was recognised, nay, that her very entrance into the station, her every movement, had been closely watched and commented upon by three of the village scandal-mongers and gossips. We will not linger over the spiteful remarks they passed upon her “disguise,” as they pleased to term her dress, nor the virtuous manner in which they assured each other that they felt obliged to inform the Countess and their neighbours of this secret midnight excursion, which could not but be linked with some deep, dark mystery that it would be their plain and painful duty to unravel. Nor will we enlarge upon the bold manner and virtuous, indignant stare which each of them cast upon poor Marion through the open window of her carriage door. She should know that she was not only recognised, but was severely condemned by them for this mid-

night escapade. What right had the likes of her to a first-class carriage? Marion shrank from their ill-natured remarks, many of which she plainly overheard—as they intended her to do—and sinking upon the seat at the further end of the carriage, turned her face to the window and looked at the rising moon, which was just visible above the dark ridge of trees which darkened her little home. She was glad and thankful when the train moved on : she had a cross journey before her, and knew that it would be some hours ere she reached her destination.

Perhaps, had her slanderers and unjust accusers been permitted to gaze into her over-burdened and crushed heart, even they might have paused in admiration at the vision of so much patient endurance. What a pity it is that more of us do not pause ere we let fly the cruel dart which oft-times pierces so sorely—nay, sometimes mortally wounds—our neighbour's aching heart !

On rushed the train, gathering speed as it went ; and higher and higher in the clear evening sky rose the moon, revealing in her light now a rolling plain of sleeping meadows, with the cottage lights dotted here and there, now a silent glen, dark and gloomy. With hollow rattle and shrieking whistle it had crossed the bridge over the shining river, and dashed into and out of the gloomy tunnel. Presently they were intruding boldly where, perchance, once stood some proud castle or monastery, each in itself more or less a cemetery. As Marion pressed her face nearer to the glass she became fascinated by the dim and ever-changing view, and

some lines which, when a child, had once been read to her from an old poem, came to her mind ; they seemed to her appropriate now, and served to divert her thoughts for a moment :

“ The dead lay down to rest,
To wait the first sound of the judgment day !
The railway whistle woke 'em up ;
They're shovelled all away.”

So upon this night, under this same moon, Manfred, ill in mind and body, brooded over his brother's wrongs, as he tossed on his bed of pain and suffering. Sister Marguerite, after her day of toil, unable to rest for the noise and horrors around, was praying for the poor prisoner and her charges ; Father Lawrence, his mind racked with anxiety for the same cause, was kneeling in his silent church, beseeching Heaven for help ; whilst Marion, the faithful wife, was speeding to his side, though he knew it not. And the subject of their thought and prayer lay peacefully smiling in his sleep on his hard prison bed.

CHAPTER XVII.

NONE of those whose fate it was to be in Paris during those last days when, after severe fighting, the Communists were finally driven back, are likely ever to forget the horrors of it.

The roar of cannon, the roll of musketry, had been continuous. To the north and the south, the east and the west of the city and its suburbs, barricades were raised and batteries levelled against them. Even the last resting-places of the quiet dead, the cemeteries, were entrenched ; whilst in the churches, notably that of St. Sulpice, the foes met in mortal combat, and kneeling upon one knee took aim from behind the stately pillars, slaughtering one another on the very threshold of the sanctuary.

The terrors of these few days seemed doubled and trebled on that last night when the Communists were finally vanquished. No sooner had the sun set, and darkness enveloped the city, than from the Tuileries and other palatial buildings arose columns of black, blinding smoke, so dense as effectually to obscure the pale light of the moon as she climbed the blue vault. These columns were intersected by rapid and flaming tongues of fire which, as they leaped up into the air, shed a lurid light around, lapping up and destroying in their greedy haste

every combustible thing within their reach. Crazy, excited women prowled stealthily around, intent upon their heartless errand of revenge. Pouring petroleum into the open grids of the largest and stateliest buildings, with fiendish joy they dropped lighted matches upon it until, what with the bombardment and the malicious aid of these wretches, flames burst forth in all directions, not only from the Tuileries, the palaces of the Legion of Honour, of the Council of State, of the Court of Accounts, but even from the Palais Royal and the Hôtel de Ville.

The fires burst forth simultaneously in all directions; it was beyond the resources of the city to subdue them until they had completed their work of destruction. Seen through the light of the crimson flames the disc of the pale moon looked red and inflamed, whilst the darkened vault above was lined with sparks of fire marking the course of the shells as they flew from battery to battery.

There was no rest for the tired inmates of the little Convent of the Rue de Cloys. Under obedience, Sister Marguerite had lain down to repose her weary limbs; but too much disturbed by the uproar without, and racked with anxiety for the safety of Ma Sœur and her community, who were in the very midst of the heat and strife of the battle, she and all her companions had gradually set aside all thought of sleep. One after another they had risen to pray for a speedy cessation, and for safety for poor Paris and all their friends. Soon they had collected in twos and threes, and were watching with white scared faces through the various little

windows the reflection upon the now darkened sky of the great raging conflagrations which seemed to arise at once from all points of the compass.

Night and darkness carry their own power of augmenting and magnifying the reality of any anxiety or calamity. Our nerves are unstrung, and we tremble with sickening dread in the dark hours at sorrows, trials, or worries which under the glare of broad daylight we can meet unflinchingly and conquer.

So, as Sister Marguerite, in her own impulsive way, flew from window to window and gazed with a stricken face at the red firmament above, reflecting in so many places the angry glare of flames below, as she listened to the ponderous roar of cannon and continuous rattle of musketry, inaction became almost unendurable to her, and she longed for the first streak of daylight, when she might sally forth and lend her little aid in the endeavour to still and soothe the unfortunate partakers of the harrowing scenes.

In her agitation, and in order to procure a clearer view of what was passing around, she had mounted the stairs and gained the attic window. Opening it quickly, she passed through, and stood for a moment upon the flat roof of the Convent. Then, struck with horror at all she saw, she instinctively fell upon her knees and prayed aloud for mercy for all who were in peril or should fall that night. As she knelt there, her hands tightly clasped together, her brave eyes raised, the thought of the poor prisoner in his lonely cell preyed upon her mind, and she almost wept as she besought Heaven to

set friend him speedily. The moonlight shone upon her upturned face, and played upon the folds of her habit, as in an attitude of entreaty she knelt.

Small wonder, then, that as he slept the prisoner smiled: for far above his dull, sad surroundings, borne up by the prayers of others, soared his now unfettered mind; and by his side his guardian spirit stood, ever ready to ward off the Evil One, and to whisper words of hope and faith; and low he bowed, in reverent love and gratitude, as he caught the prayers of her who kept the midnight vigil for his precious charge.

Ever and anon Sister Marguerite's thoughts flew to the bedsides of her own special charges, and frequently her gaze wandered in the direction of Madame Corbette's domicile. There had been some stiff fighting near, but the Communists had vacated their posts and had fled panic-stricken in every direction, while every now and again shells from the captured batteries followed their flight, "putting in imminent peril my poor little cottage," thought the nun, as she strained her eyes once more in that direction. "God grant that it at least may be spared." Filled with an overwhelming anxiety the Superioress rang a bell, and thus summoned her small community around her. "They would retire to the little oratory," she said, "and await in prayer the return of day."

It was still but early dawn when, in answer to urgent calls at the Convent gate, she allowed her Sisters to depart on their different errands of charity. To each she imparted stringent orders,

with grave instructions as to care and prudence in running no unnecessary risks.

When all the others had departed, one alone remained, and this was Sister Marguerite. Was she to be the only one left unemployed? Truly she hoped not; for in her present frame of mind inactivity was the one thing she dreaded most.

Turning at last towards her, the troubled face of the Superioress beamed suddenly with fresh warmth and kindness. Did she not guess quite easily the impatient zeal that was burning in this little English Sister's heart? Taking her therefore by the hand, she said kindly but reservedly:

"Some little time ago there came a most urgent call for you, Sister Marguerite; but learning that there was great danger on the way, I scarcely deemed the cause worthy of the risk you would run in attending to it. But twice since then has the call been repeated, and I am perplexed as to what to do for the best."

"Who is it that needs my aid?" she asked quickly, her expressive eyes full of anxiety.

"Only old Madame Corbette. It appears she is seriously worse, and entreats that you may be allowed to visit her. But," said the elder nun, averting her eyes so as to avoid meeting the pleading face before her, "she has resisted grace so long! The distance to her abode is too great, and the road thereto is beset with so many dangers that I *cannot* bring myself to bid you go."

"Oh, Sister, think how long Heaven has waited for this old sinner's return. Remember the years she has lived in avowed separation from God. She

is very, very old, and it would so gladden my heart to see her make her peace with Him whose very existence she has endeavoured for so long to deny. I am sure Ma Sœur would not refuse me permission to go to her; we must not lose her after all our striving and patience!"

The sweet face of the young nun looked so eloquent in its pleading that the Superioress was moved to yield a tardy consent, though her heart somewhat misgave her: a foreboding of danger for the young Sister overshadowed her mind. However, duty must give place to sentiment, she thought, as, chasing the evil presentiment from her mind, she repeated her instructions for prudence and caution; and calling an elderly woman from the kitchen—one who had sought refuge and rest in the Convent—she desired her to accompany Sister Marguerite; then blessing her she bade her go in God's name.

Having packed with alacrity her little basket of provisions, the young nun moved joyfully forward and hastened towards the door. On opening it, she judged from the partial cessation of warlike sounds that the conflict had, for the time being at least, somewhat abated; but the air was still heavily laden with the stifling odour of powder smoke, as she and her companion stepped out into the deserted street. The early morning sun was but rising, streaking the eastern sky with rare and brilliant splendour, and in the eyes of the hurrying Sister there burned a ray of eager joy, a fit reflection of that light above.

What joy to think that Heaven might not be

deprived of the soul of the old woman after all ! Poor old Mère Corbette—she should yet join her good husband. How Ma Sœur would rejoice when she heard the news ! She must hasten ; the old woman had so little strength left upon which to rely. What if she should chance to be too late after all ! Such thoughts as these followed each other in rapid succession in her mind, forcing her to speed on even more quickly. In one of the groups of pedestrians which she encountered, all bearing more or less a worried, blackened appearance, she suddenly recognised the figure of old Pierre. She went straight up to him, and drawing him a little aside, begged of him, in the name of mercy and charity, to direct his steps to the nearest church, and thence to conduct a priest, with all possible speed, to the abode of the dying woman.

“It will save time,” she argued, “if you go at once—and there is none to lose—so go, good Pierre—go quickly !—and God will bless you.” There was no need to urge him more ; what would he not do to serve any of the kind nuns to whom he owed so much ? Saluting her with the gravest respect, he bent his steps without hesitation in the direction of the church.

A smile of sudden delight broke across her face. “What if my brother Percy—Father de Woodville—be sent in answer to the summons,” she thought. “He is now there, for his note of yesterday acquainted me with the fact. What if God should send *him* to aid the poor old soul ! Dear Percy ! How beautiful it would be to meet at such a death-bed !”

"Sister Marguerite!" cried her companion, "I am growing old, and cannot run as you do: kindly let me pause for breath. I am almost exhausted from the fatigue of hurrying so. Here, come this way," she gasped, suddenly jerking the unsuspecting nun round a sharp bend in the street. "See you not those ruffians ahead of us?" continued the woman sharply. "We must hide in this deserted yard until they have passed. Have you so soon forgotten your promise to be cautious?"

The woman was only too thankful for the opportunity to rest and breathe, but the quick spirit of Sister Marguerite chafed inwardly at the enforced delay. "Oh dear, oh dear—would they ever reach the poor old woman in time?"

It was fully ten minutes before the motley mob of soldiers, with their prisoners and the usual gaping crowd, had passed, leaving the street once more in comparative quiet; then with a kind and merry word of apology to her now pacified companion, on sped the Sister again, faster than before. The poor woman gave it up as hopeless; and running after her, clutched tightly hold of the nun's habit. "The weight of me will steady her a little," she argued to herself; "I must do something since she will not listen to reason."

Sister Marguerite was compelled to laugh when she felt the full weight of the drag brought to bear upon her, and endeavoured to still her anxiety and accommodate her pace to that of her companion. "What a terrible old slow-coach she is!" was her mental observation. "But it is yet early; perhaps, after all, I may be in time."

They were well outside the city walls now, amidst the deserted houses, when Sister Marguerite suddenly stopped, and raising her hands in horror and alarm, exclaimed :

“My God, what is that ! My cottage on fire ! Oh, cease to hold me, good Mélanie, and fly with me. Nay, do not detain me,” she urged, springing from the woman’s grasp and dropping the basket on the shattered pavement. “Carry that for me, and follow as quickly as you can ! My patients—where are they ? Kind Heaven, where are they ?” she cried in alarm, as she flew down the rough, uneven street, and round the corner of the next. “Would anyone have remembered these poor creatures and have gone to their aid in time ? Was it, indeed, her cottage, or was it some building close to it that was ablaze ? Sweet Jesu, help them,” she cried as, almost breathless, she still ran on. One moment more and she would be within sight of the burning pile.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BANDS of desperate fanatics had been driven back in search of refuge and shelter towards that quarter in which was sheltered the small homestead of Mère Corbette ; and in order to revenge themselves more fully for their defeat they were determined to wreck everything of value that still remained. And so it came to pass that fiendish women of the Commune, wild with the madness of disappointed rage, assisted and urged their confederates to commit the blackest deeds of cruelty. Not only did they aid in setting fire to the best part of the city, but they were more than suspected of endeavouring by diabolical contrivances to poison the troops.

When the sun arose above the horizon, sending its brilliant rays in majestic splendour through the confines of the gilded clouds, there flew from mouth to mouth the news of the cruel and sacrilegious deed that had been perpetrated by those lawless wretches. They had struck where they knew the blow would be most keenly felt. In cold blood they had led out the Archbishop and many of his priests, and had shot them down like dogs. What cared they now what befell the town, since the cause was lost for which they had fought so desperately ! So, as they sought escape by flight

from their enraged pursuers, every here and there they stayed their course and fired whatever they deemed worth the trouble; and thus it came to pass that they judged the big vacant buildings near Madame Corbette's tiny residence worthy of a light.

A fresh strong wind was rising rapidly; it fanned the angry flames and carried aloft the blackening smoke; in its strength it bore sparks and fragments of smouldering timber, of window frames and burning beams; and some of these it dropped upon the small dry roof below, where they found quick and ready occupation in the ancient fabric of the little cottage.

The wreckers laughed and jeered as they passed on. Only one seemed to remember then that the little tenement sheltered a confederate of their own—a nephew of hers, who, when he suddenly realised the danger that threatened his old aunt, rushed into the cottage, and half dragged, half carried the weak and suffering woman to a place of safety in an adjoining building. There having laid her, roughly enough, upon the floor of an empty room, he left her—half-dazed now with fright and exhaustion, to the tender mercies of any one who would minister to her; and himself rushed off to a more secure place of retreat.

A small group of idle watchers had collected near the burning buildings, interested for the time being in the conflagration, and speculating as to the probability of the fire's spreading rapidly amid the ruins, when almost breathless, but with a firm, set look upon her face, Sister Marguerite arrived upon

the scene. They stared blankly at her as, seizing the hand of the man nearest to her, she asked anxiously whether the inmates of that little cottage had been rescued.

"I don't know," said the man, turning rudely aside. "It's not my business to rescue foolhardy folks from situations like this. What right have people to endanger their lives by living in such places at times like these?"

She did not wait to hear his answer out, but walked quickly forward towards the cottage, which each moment appeared to be more clearly encircled by the belt of flames. They seemed to arise from the back; and blown by the gusty wind, one half the crimson circle had already reached the creepers on the wooden porch, and greedy tongues of fire were darting over the open doorway.

"Come back! Come back at once, Sister!" cried a man from the group; and he grasped her vigorously by the shoulders. "You shall not advance further. I tell you the old dame is safe. She is not here; I saw her rescued and carried to safer quarters. If you do not believe me, come and see for yourself."

"It is true, dear Sister; my good man speaks well. The woman is quite safe. It was her nephew who rescued her; we both saw him do it. You must not advance further."

"But my patient, the Englishman!" cried the nun, turning pale with fear and excitement, "where is he? Ah, you cannot say! No one has thought of him. He must not be deserted and left to perish. His life is of value, I tell you. Loose

your hold of me, I insist upon it! He has lost his limbs for France: he cannot aid himself. I will not be detained! Come with me if you will, and do not waste the precious moments."

"Ah, he's safe enough, I'll warrant," answered the man significantly, though somewhat averting his head, so as to avoid meeting her penetrating gaze. In so doing he relinquished his firm grasp of her shoulder, but retained a close grip of her hand while his wife held on to the other.

"Safe!" she echoed ironically, as with one foot advanced she stood a prisoner between them—whilst her eyes with fearless courage measured the imminent danger before her—"safe! yes, his poor helpless body is hopelessly enough hemmed around by those devouring flames. But his soul! It may be in peril. Loose your hold, I say," and she struggled to be free.

"Is there not a man among you," she cried, "who for the honour of France will lend a hand to rescue a fellow soul from destruction—one, too, who has risked his life to save her citizens?"

"Listen to reason!" shouted the man, angered by her continued resistance. "Behold the flames! You cannot enter the cottage now. Are you not already half deafened by the fall of timber and the crackle of fire? If your patient is still within, he must be stifled and dead ere this. And if not—well, of what good is he? He is feeble, maimed, and helpless; you yourself have told us so."

"But he is an *Englishman*!" cried the Sister, as with a supreme effort she freed herself from their grasp, and rushed through the living flames

to the rescue of her countryman. So *much* depended upon her patient's life. It was for all their sakes she did it, and—

"Never king nor conqueror's brow,
Wore higher look than hers did now."

CHAPTER XIX.

SINCE the evening hour when his gentle nurse had left his side, Manfred had not closed his eyes in sleep. The terrible and warlike voices raging around would alone have sufficed to rob him of all power to rest or slumber; but apart from any external interruption, his soul was so racked and storm-tossed that, in the cruel but salutary conflict going on within, he paid at first little heed to the clamour without. As in the last moments (according to current belief) of a drowning man, each and every incident of his life was portrayed plainly before him.

Before his mind's vision stood forth those degrading acts of boyish envy and selfishness which had been the first means of depriving his brother of his due—his uncle's love and trust. Thence sprang those horrible deeds of black injustice and perjury, by which he had basely wrecked another's life—receiving what in return? A usurped inheritance, and a heart which dared not seek its God, and from which peace seemed for ever banished. Oh, foul and dark—foul with the presence and pressure of guilt, and dark with the blankness of despair—seemed the pages of his life this night. Was the cry of his soul so feeble, so stifled by vice,

that no echo of it could ever reach the mercy-seat above? He clasped his hands and raised his burning eyes as he called on Heaven to witness his repentance. To prove his sincerity he would confess all; he would undo the past and would henceforth stand before his fellow-creatures without disguise. "I will take upon myself all opprobrium and blame. I will show the world the unvarnished villain that I am! And Edmund, poor Edmund, you shall have your revenge at last! For it shall be even as she said it should be. What were her words? 'Heaven and earth must bear witness to the sincerity of Harold's repentance ere he may hope to obtain mercy.' Yes, these were her words, and they shall be fulfilled. Kind, gentle little nurse, the noble yet sweet spirit that pervades your inmost soul has conquered mine, and the thought of your pure and spotless life will give me nerve to face the worst. The most cruel prison could never surpass or equal the torture I have sustained of late. Ah, I shall have one solace in my lonely hours of degradation. *She* will be sorry for me; *she* will pray for her repentant patient! and Heaven will hear and grant her prayers, though it should be deaf to mine."

"The stranger is worse to-night," thought Jeanne, as she paused to listen to the unintelligible sounds which issued from the other room. "I wonder what is wrong with him now? His voice is expressive of great distress: yet if I demand kindly what grieves him, he does not answer me, but continues to rave in his own harsh and unintelligible language. I suppose it is the way with these

rough foreigners. I shall leave him to calm himself. Well, he is not the only one in trouble. How restless even is my old aunt! She calls incessantly for Sister Marguerite; and how ill she looks! I never saw anyone before look so like death and live. There, she calls the Sister again! Yes, yes, aunt: I will go in search of her. They neither of them require my immediate care," she pondered, "and I long to know what is going on outside." So glancing to assure herself that, according to her aunt's desire, the key was turned in the door which separated the two rooms, and glad of an opportunity to allay her curiosity, she stole quietly out, closing the door behind her.

The mind of Manfred was diverted from the contemplation of his own misery for a moment as he listened to the perpetual cry of the old woman. There was a ring in her cracked voice which he had never heard before, expressive of humility and sorrow, as she persisted in her entreaties.

"Sister Marguerite! Dear, kind Sister Marguerite, where are you? Why do you not come to me? I am old, and so feeble and ill: I want you. I hear the voice of my husband: he calls me, and bids me tell you to hasten."

"And do I not need her too?" thought Manfred. "Yes, indeed; for I will conceal from her my name and guilt no longer. She will be just—perhaps more severe—but she will also be wise. Edmund shall know and bless her too; for to her he shall owe his freedom. Until the moment of her return I will endeavour to curb my impatience by repeating those sweet prayers she taught me."

And as he did so, the unrest and disquiet within him seemed to grow less and less, until at last they almost vanished, leaving him tranquil and hopeful. As his peace of mind increased he became more conscious of the continuous and gnawing pain in his foot. He endeavoured to relieve the aching limb by constantly changing its position within the narrow couch. Then the strange sounds outside attracted and perplexed him. What was going to be the upshot of it all, he wondered. Now it was the roar of cannon which distracted him, now the crack of artillery. A few moments ago it was far off, now it is much closer; nay, the small roof above him vibrated with that last shock. What would he not give to be able to watch the event? It was a terrible punishment for one of his temperament to be forced to lie thus inert. Would the pale moon never set? Would the day never dawn? How long and weary were the hours growing! For a time there seemed to be a lull in the conflict, and Manfred was grateful for it. It is one thing to be up and able to aid one's self in such a crisis; it is totally different when, bedridden and helpless, we must serve but as a target to two conflicting parties.

Now there drew nigh, increasing each instant and gaining power and force as it advanced, the sound as of a seething multitude: not the rhythmic tramp-tramp of a [regiment, but, as it were, the bursting forth of savage waters, came this wild concourse of human beings, rushing onward without order or reason. Closer and closer it came, this flood of unruly pattering feet. Soon he could

distinguish the shrieking voices of fanatical women, blended with the frightened cry of children and the more surly, defiant tones of men.

How quickly they swept along ! The foremost were even now passing the cottage door.

Madame Corbette has ceased her cries. Is she listening, too ? Oh, the rush of mingled sounds as the multitude scuttles past !

Whilst the first frantic roll of the boisterous human billow is fading and dying in the distance, the rear of it has halted and broken its force upon the untenanted breakers near.

There is something weird and uncanny in its movements now—a stealthy creeping sound. They are dragging wood and combustible débris, and piling them round the ruins.

It is still too dark to see ; the moon has hidden her face beneath a cloud ; but following the sounds with a sudden keenness of perception this is what Manfred surmises. If so—good God—what will be their next move ? He hears their quick stealthy tread beneath the casement, but the blind is drawn closely down ; it is dark, and he is helpless !

There is a pause of five minutes. Things seem quieter now ; perhaps all occasion for fear is over. He breathes more evenly. But what is that sudden darkness, as of a black pall, which falls upon the window-pane, enveloping every familiar object in the little room. He grows paler as once more he raises his head, watches, and listens. It is lifting a little now, and flashes, as of dusky lightning, shoot across the window-panes. The light increases rapidly ; soon—very soon—it glows a livid red ;

and there is a spluttering, crackling sound, and the noise of men's voices has ceased. Good heavens! Is it possible that they have set fire to something near? There is no mistaking the sound of a conflagration now. The roar and glare of the flames, as they mount higher and higher, the stifling smell of smoke, which penetrates every crevice of the cottage walls, proves his terrible surmises to be correct. There is a box of matches, also a little candle by his side, but there is now no need for either, the small apartment is lit up all too brilliantly by the red flames outside.

He seizes his watch and discovers that it still wants a quarter to three; there are several hours yet before his kind nurse is due. Even then, will she be allowed to come? The roads are, indeed, unfit for her to traverse; and if she should come, what will have happened before her arrival! He wiped the great beads of perspiration from his brow, and trembled at the dread prospect before him. "Jeanne! Jeanne!" he cried, "where are you?" And at the sound of his own voice he started: it was so hollow and unnatural. There comes no response to his call; the old woman, too, is silent; yet all the while the fearful sounds outside continue, and the roar of the flames increases as the breeze fans them.

He strains eyes and ears, gazing and listening intently. Help is arriving. Hark! The outer door is burst rudely open, and the scuffle of men's feet upon the floor is discernible. Heaven be thanked!

"Help! Help!" he cried in English, forgetting

in his fright every other manner of speech. But his voice was drowned in that of Madame Corbette's, whom her nephew is dragging from her bed.

"Help! Help!—for God's sake do not forget me," he cried again. "I am helpless, and cannot aid myself! Do not leave me here to die!" But if they hear they do not heed him, and the cries of the old woman grow more and more indistinct as she is carried away into the street.

He listened half-dazed to the last faint sounds of retreating voices and steps; then with a cry of despair, sank back upon the pillow and wept for very misery and weakness. Sickness had sharpened his apprehension, and he realised to the full the horror of his situation. The cottage is surrounded by living flames, and he, Harold Manfred, the traitor, upon whose worthless life so much depended, was left alone to perish, to die amidst the sharpest suffering. Now it was that the demon of despair visited him, and the sublime lessons taught by the gentle nun came to his aid. Why not relieve his feelings and die like a man who fears nothing? Why not die cursing fate, and the All-mighty Power which thus led and held him to it? But by some mysterious power the evil words which in former times had started so glibly to his lips have now all fled from his memory. Only the sacred refrain, the soft rhythm of the short prayers which he had learnt, and had repeated so frequently that night, recurred to his scared and agitated brain. He felt willing to lie and await death where he was, but he must not do so. For the sake of his brother, if not for himself, he must

make an effort. All he longed for now was to confess his own guilt and plead his brother's innocence. The shock had stilled all bodily pain ; and throwing back the bed-clothes, he reached the floor with his hands and fell upon his one remaining knee.

A feeling of faintness almost overpowered him, but with a superhuman effort he contrived to creep a yard or two ; then, his strength failing him, he fell prostrate.

The noise and the bitter stench of smouldering wood again roused him to action. With scared eyes he now observed thin smoke issuing from the floor and skirting-board over which stood his little bed. Another effort and he might reach the door. Might Heaven aid him. Upon his feeble hands and his knee slowly—so slowly—he crept along. Never before had the room appeared so spacious. At last he reached the door. Leaning against it he rose upon his injured knee, and grasped the handle. Frantically he twisted and shook it ; alas, it yielded not to his most strenuous efforts : and with all its force of sickening fright the truth flashed upon him. The door was locked on the other side. Alone—unaided—he must perish thus !

Once more despair beset him. After all, of what avail was hope or trust in God if a terrible death like this awaited him ? Crawling back a pace or two from the door, and sinking into a helpless heap, he drew the folds of his dressing-gown more closely around him and, supporting his distracted head against the wall, clasped his hands together and sat staring like one demented, waiting, as he thought,

for Sister. The sweet refrain still echoed in his ears, and issued from his parched and pallid lips : " My God, I believe in Thee ; my God, I hope in Thee, and love Thee with all my heart." Only every now and again his prayer alternated with the plaintive cry : " Do not be long, Sister Marguerite, do not be long ! "

He did not catch the sound of her soft footfall as she bounded across the outer room ; nor did he discern the sound of the key as, in answer to her touch, it revolved quickly in the lock. But he heard the creak of the door as it turned upon its hinges, revealing as it did so the sweet apparition of his deliverer. Heated and soiled she stood for an instant upon the threshold, peering through the fast-gathering smoke for the object of her search. Overcome as he was with joy and gratitude, yet his strained eyes expressed no surprise at her appearance ; rather there was a look in them of gladdest welcome, which seemed to say, " I *knew* you would come to save me ; " and though unable to articulate a sound, he held out his hands towards her as a helpless child to its mother.

One quick glance around and she instantly grasped the situation ; and a glad *Deo gratias* rose from her heart when she discovered that she was still in time to save the life upon which so much depended. It was no time for words. Acts, prompt and decisive, could alone avail now. Full well she knew that the house was encircled with scorching flames, that the roof was alight, that her very *cornette* was scorched and blackened by the flames through which she had dashed, and through which

she again must pass, this time burdened with a helpless load. But her heart was strong and full of loving faith in God's providence as, silently and rapidly, but with dogged determination, she drew a blanket from the bed and, spreading it upon the floor, she seized the great ewer of water and saturated it with its contents.

Manfred followed her every action with fevered excitement, much as a drowning man watches the approach of the lifeboat which is hastening to his rescue. So far neither had spoken ; but now, her preparations completed, she turned to him with a bright, hopeful smile, placed her hands beneath his shoulders, and dragged him on to the blanket.

"Have courage," she said, "and aid me in my efforts. With God's help I will save you yet! Make yourself as small as you can, or the blanket will not cover you!"

As she dropped upon her knees, gathering together the four corners of the blanket, he realised, as he had never done before, the sublime worth of charity. His heart was filled with shame. Seizing her hand, he cried: "Sister Marguerite, ere you risk your life further on my behalf, hear me! You *shall* know for whom you make this generous sacrifice: there is still time for you to save yourself if you will leave me to the fate I deserve!"

She shook her head and smiled somewhat impatiently, endeavouring to complete her preparations; but with the untimely strength of a dying man he held her hand, repeating once more with wildest emphasis:

"Listen!—you shall, you *must* hear me. I—"

am the scoundrel of whom I told you ; he who for shame's sake I designated Manly is myself, Harold Manfred. It is I who have allowed my brother to pine unjustly in a prison cell Leave me, therefore, to perish, dear Sister ; and hasten, I entreat you, to save yourself and to liberate him ! Oh, why do you look thus pitifully upon me ? I swear to you I am not raving ! Why do you not flee ? ”

Still upon her knees, her face full of energy, her hands grasping tightly the saving blanket, she answered hurriedly :

“ Long have I known the truth of what you say ; but should you be spared, will you confess to others what you have now told unto me ? ”

“ I swear to you in this hour of horror that, should Heaven see fit to save me, I will not rest one day until, before lawful witnesses, I have confessed *all*, and done my utmost to undo the past. ”

“ Then haste and aid me now. And, for poor Edmund's sake, may God bless you as I do—I, Sister Marguerite, known to you once as Beatrice de Woodville. ”

“ The Lady Beatrice ! ” Dropping her hand, he stared wildly at her. “ Is it possible ? ” he groaned. Then, murmuring to himself, as though the announcement had overpowered him with shame, he continued : “ Ah, had I not been such a fool I might have known it long ago ! Forgive me for all I have said and done, but remember that with my last breath I bade you fly from me and save yourself. ”

While these sentences were quickly exchanged the apartment was filling fast with smoke. The

skirting-board beneath Manfred's bed was being rapidly devoured by brisk little tongues of fire; the glass from the window had cracked and dropped out, the framework was on fire; the roof was threatening to fall in. Her patient seemed dazed and stupid now. "O God, help me with my task!" she cried aloud, as half blind and stifled with smoke she knit together the four corners of the blanket and tied a wet handkerchief across her nose and mouth.

With both hands she seized the blanket; then putting forth all her strength, drew the helpless body through the first doorway and across Madame Corbette's room as far as the outer door. Here her passage seemed to be generally barred.

The flames had spread and were meeting now upon the upper portion of the wooden porch, so that it was barely possible to creep beneath them—and even so, she must leave behind her the helpless man for whom she had ventured so much. She could hear voices outside, and could see the gaping crowd gesticulating wildly. They had done their utmost to prevent her entering the burning building. It was no fault of theirs if she perished, they were assuring Dr. Arno, who, though busily engaged in professional duties, had observed the flames and hurried to the scene.

"You stand there gaping, and tell me that some one is still inside?" he cried savagely.

"Yes, yes!—a mad nun: she would go and try to save her countryman."

"Great God! It must be *she*, none else would do it," he cried; and rushing close to the burning door

he called frantically : "Sister Marguerite ! Sister Marguerite ! Sister Marguerite ! Are you there ? "

"Yes, I am close to you, doctor " (for she recognised his voice). "For God's sake help me to save my burden ! See"—falling upon her knees—"I will push him out. Do you seize him, for he is half dead, and draw him down the steps. I will follow, if possible."

Dr. Arno, though scorched and blackened, seized the helpless roll of humanity ; but in his eagerness to save the brave nun, whose inflamed and crimson hands he could just discern, he gave Manfred but one rough strong pull, leaving it to others to pick him up and attend to him, and clutched the brave little hands to draw her through the flames.

Poor little injured hands ! that had wrought so many and such noble deeds of charity—they clung to his as he swiftly drew her forth over the burning, heated floor. Even as he did so the upper portion of the old roof and porch fell in, and some of the débris fell upon her.

"She is hurt, but, thank God, she lives !" cried the doctor in a trembling voice, as he noticed the handkerchief ; and reverently raising her insensible form in his arms, carried her out and away from the smoke and flames. Even as he spoke there arose from that hitherto dazed and frightened crowd such a ringing cheer as rent the air with its exultant tones of joy and admiration.

A strange sound to issue from the throats of men on such a day as that !

CHAPTER XX.

THE echo of that cry startled old Pierre as, with gaping mouth and wide open eyes, he hurried on his way, guiding the priest to the site of what was once old Mère Corbette's abode.

"Father, we are too late!" he cried, throwing up his arms in horror and despair. "All is over, and the place is in flames. What terrible times are these!"

But the young priest heard him not. He had halted by an improvised stretcher and was on his knees beside it, gazing into the sweet face of his own, his only sister, his once wild, merry little Bertie!

The bystanders knew at a glance that he had come prepared to administer the last Sacraments, and reverently and instinctively they had fallen back as he pressed forward. There was a look in the startled gaze of the young priest, as he bent over the apparently inanimate form of his sister, and a likeness between them so plainly stamped upon their features, that even Dr. Arno, eager and impatient as he was to have his patient carried to safe shelter, and himself to attend to her wants, paused and made room for the stranger priest.

It was three years since the brother and sister

200 Honour without Renown.

had seen each other, and was it thus they met at last ! Father de Woodville's quick eye took in the burnt and blackened *cornette*, which, however, had preserved unhurt the head within it. He saw the crimson, swollen hands, the charred sleeves, the damaged habit ; but the wet kerchief had preserved the kind features.

"Is she seriously hurt?" he asked, quickly and nervously.

"No, I trust not," answered the doctor. "But delay might prove serious. It is in consequence of her efforts to save the life of another that she lies thus ! Let us move on, I beg. She shall want for nothing. I will attend to her myself, for I know her well."

"So do I," said the priest, rising proudly, "for she is my only sister." Then tenderly bending over her once more, he whispered in her ears : "May God have you in His holy care, dear Bertie ! Fear nothing ! for I, your brother Percy, am by your side."

She seemed to recognise the voice, for a faint, glad smile rippled her lips. Then she murmured uneasily : "Seek the Englishman ! 'Tis imperative that you see him. Go to him ! He must confess ——" Unable to finish the sentence she relapsed into another swoon.

"Whom does she mean ?" inquired the priest.

"Why, the useless creature whom she rescued. It appears as if she knows some mystery concerning him. Move on, my men, and dally no longer. *She* is our first care. I will take her to the Convent in the Rue des Cloys. And do you, Father, find

the English stranger, as she desires—he may be dead ere this—I know not—then follow us. There must be something urgent in the case, or she would not be so persistent in her desires.”

Father de Woodville felt the truth of the doctor's words ; but it was with a heavy heart that he saw the little procession move solemnly forward, and himself turn in search of his countryman, for whom his sister had risked so much. “He may be dying,” he thought. “It is my duty to seek him, and aid her in her charity.”

“Is it the wounded foreigner that you seek?” questioned a woman near—the same who had sought to deter Sister Marguerite from entering the burning cottage. I know where he is, my Father, and will gladly lead you to him. There are two of them dying together. Come quickly, then, and follow me !”

The woman, delighted to get the services of a priest at last, hurried on nimbly enough over the broken and uneven pavements, followed in silence by Father Basil, who appeared serious and absorbed.

She led him into the interior of a deserted house which otherwise was not so dilapidated as its neighbours. There, in one corner of a room which once had served as the dining-room, stretched upon an old mattress, and covered with a torn flag left behind them by the fugitives, lay old Madame Corbette. For hours she had been raving in wildest impatience, chafing at her sufferings and her lot ; but when Father de Woodville drew near, and, touching her, spoke kindly but authoritatively

to her, she ceased her cries, and fixing her small, black eyes upon his countenance, stared long and curiously at him.

“Be quiet!” he said gently. “Sister Marguerite is ill; she cannot come to you, but has sent me in her place. I am her brother, and a priest. For her sake, let me do for you what I can; for you are very ill, and are not fit to meet the good God with such language on your lips as I heard just now.”

She liked his face, and could scarcely withdraw her aged eyes from it; there was something so familiar in the aspect and expression of his features, and his voice pleased and soothed her. Then in a fearful tone she said:

“Sister Marguerite is ill, you say? Poor little soul!” Tears came into her scorched old eyes as she continued: “So she is ill, is she! Will she die? Then will I not fear to die also, for she would come to my aid. She is good—she is an angel! Would that I were like her!”

“Be like her, then,” he said kindly, seating himself on an old wooden box by her side. “There is yet time to ask for mercy. But”—turning to the woman—“Where is the Englishman?”

“On the other side of that door, in another room. He is but just recovering consciousness. I will go and attend to him while you do all you can for the old woman, who we feared would die long ere this. She is a special patient of Sister Marguerite’s, and has been a vile old wretch in her time; but she is, I hope, repentant now.”

Father Basil nodded, and signed to the woman to leave them. The large window of the apartment

was destitute of glass, and the voices of the passers-by were carried in on the fresh morning breeze ; but the inmates were far too occupied to heed them. The room spoke of the most abject misery and desolation, but to the eye of faith it was filled with the richest and mightiest mystery of God's goodness.

Left by themselves the priest and penitent wasted not the precious moments, for, for one of them, the sands of life had nearly run out. No more wild or incoherent words escaped now from the white lips of the dying woman ; and, as sometimes happens during the last hour of life, her intellect was clearer and steadier than it had been for many a day.

Few of the passers-by paused to look in at the vacant window, and those who did showed no surprise. It had grown such a familiar sight for months past—that of a priest bending over the sick and dying in the open squares, the streets, and wherever else their fellow-creatures were falling—that if they paused to look at all they but muttered a prayer, or it might be bowed reverently, and moved on. But the rays of the bright morning sun, as they stole into the bare dismantled room, flooding it with a golden light, were but a figure of the sweet silent streams of grace as they flowed into that hardened old sinner's heart, filling it with penitential sorrow. It was surely in direct answer to long enduring patience and persistent prayer that the power of realising so keenly the true state of her soul was bestowed upon the aged woman. As she heard the patter of men's feet passing to

and fro, she knew that soon the echo of their footsteps would be unheard and unheeded by her. Then who would pause to breathe a prayer or cast a thought or care upon the poor turbulent spirit of the old fanatic? Ah, there was one—perhaps there were two—who would surely stay their steps, and kneeling for a moment would pray at the lonely graveside of old Mère Corbette. Sister Marguerite and Ma Sœur would not forget her.

But time was slipping away from her: a few precious moments only remained in which to make reparation for a whole lifetime. The proud, hard spirit seemed broken at last; and when the words of absolution sounded in her ears, they fell upon a soul penetrated with a deep humility and the sense of guilt. She listened entranced, as it were, to the voice of the priest as he blessed her, and bade her soul “depart in peace.” How peaceful and repentant beyond her apparent deserts was the soul of the old woman as she thanked God and blessed Ma Sœur and Sister Marguerite for all their unwearied patience in her regard.

“Ask them to pray for me, Father! Tell them that through their prayers I died repentant at last.” And raising her feeble hand to make the saving sign, she fell helplessly back: the soul of the old woman had fled to the judgment seat.

Father de Woodville closed her eyes and folded the worn old arms across her breast. He smoothed decently the crumpled limbs; and kneeling, prayed awhile beside the lonely body. Then rising, he sighed as he recollected that there was still another duty to perform ere he would be at liberty to follow

his sister. But they were *her* special patients, and he must not begrudge the time. Taking one last survey of the now desolate room, he crossed the floor and opened the door leading to the adjoining apartment.

The woman rose as he entered, saying, "Take this chair, Father; perhaps *you* may be able to comprehend what he says: I cannot. He is recovering now, but talks so incoherently I know not what he means."

CHAPTER XXI.

FATHER DE WOODVILLE advanced and took his stand beside the old wooden bedstead, upon which they had laid Manfred. Taking one of his wasted hands he felt his pulse ; then he laid his other upon the sufferer's brain.

“Go at once for wine or milk, good woman ; for he is faint, and his lips are parched with thirst. He is exhausted and must have sustenance.”

She bustled off, saying that “she wondered indeed where she should find it” ; but she had not proceeded far before she met old Pierre hurrying forward. Dr. Arno, with great forethought, had stopped on his way to the Convent, and had procured restoratives for the sick patients, charging the old man to deliver them into the hands of the priest.

Manfred groaned and muttered something incoherently as Father Basil poured some wine through his parched lips. But it was not long before he opened his eyes wearily ; then, as he met the gaze of the priest bent full upon him, the two men looked long and curiously at each other.

“Who can he be ?” pondered the priest. “Poor fellow, he is but a wreck of what once he must

have been ; and yet—and yet—long ago I have surely known someone like him. Who was it ? ”

“ Who is he ? ” puzzled Manfred, fixing his large brown eyes upon the features of the priest. “ Are my eyes bewitched ? ” he asked trembling, “ or does this man show a face like hers ? I dare not ask if she herself is saved ? How could I bear the answer if they were to tell me that she has perished ?—perished that I might be saved. And yet I cannot endure this agony of suspense. ” He relaxed his gaze for a moment and heaved such a painful sigh that Father Basil once more laid his hand kindly on that of Manfred, saying gently :

“ You are very tired. Your heart is ill at ease ! Come, do not sigh so hopelessly, but confide in me, and tell me how I can aid you. ”

His words, his look, his very manner of speech and touch reminded Manfred so forcibly of Sister Marguerite that he stared more anxiously ; and though he gasped audibly in his endeavour to speak, no word passed his lips.

“ You look, ” resumed the priest, “ as though there were something in my appearance which fills you with astonishment. Pray what can it be that strikes you speechless ? ”

“ Who—who are you ? ” at last gasped the sick man, wiping the perspiration from his brow.

“ I am Father Basil, a Benedictine monk ; and have been sent especially to your relief and assistance. ”

“ But who sent you ?—for I know neither priest nor monk ; and why—tell me why—you are the image of her whose very name I dare not—cannot

—breathe : for, alas, I know not whether she live; or the cruel flames have devoured her ! But this much I do know : whilst the flames raged wildly around us, in the midst of their fury I divined her name, her image. Then I seemed to see—to know and understand—the sublimity of her calling. And to save *me* she willingly and nobly risked her life !”

The colour rose to Father de Woodville’s brow as he heard Manfred’s words, emphasising the likeness between brother and sister. Then, bowing his head, he said :

“Thank God, she who by her charitable exertions saved your life still lives ; though for how long He who preserved her alone knows.”

Manfred listened breathlessly, as though his frail life hung upon the words ; then, when Father Basil ceased speaking, he burst into a paroxysm of tears, sobbing for relief and gratitude.

“There now, you must be brave, and not let joy kill you outright ; though, of course, it is but natural that you should feel grateful to Sister Marguerite for all that she has done for you.”

“Grateful ! Oh the word is cold—no words can ever express my feelings. Had you sinned as deeply as I—had you endured the remorse which I have suffered—you would be better able to judge what she has done for me. But tell me yet another thing. Who sent you to my aid ? Did she ? If so, then you are more than welcome, Father !” And the poor wasted hand sought and grasped, with all its little strength, that of Father Basil.

“Listen, Father. I have a solemn vow to fulfil—a vow made to her in our direct moment of peril. You first shall hear the confession I have to make; for it shall be public. You shall listen: but you must not pity, nor must you spare me! I have done wrong! So bitterly have I wronged another that I am prepared to suffer any penalty in atonement. I have told her all, and she is just: she bids me make compensation.”

“There—gently! gently!” said the priest soothingly; for he noted how wild and excited the sick man was becoming. “By-and-bye you shall tell me all. Meanwhile, try and recuperate your strength, and take some nourishment. Like you, I am feeling somewhat tired and faint; for as yet I have not broken my fast this morning.”

“Alas, I cannot eat; I am not hungry. But to gain the necessary strength to fulfil my vow, I will take all the sustenance that I am able; perhaps it may help to still the wild throbbings of my heart. Only, as we are thus quietly together, tell me yet one thing more. Did Sister Marguerite ask you personally to come to my aid?”

“She did. I came to *her* assistance; and she bid me go in search of you. God knows, it cost me much to leave her; for we had not met for years, and I am her brother.”

“Her brother! You her brother!—and a De Woodville!” stammered Manfred, endeavouring to raise himself upon his arms and thus gain a clearer view of his companion. “Ah, that is why you are so like her; and you would not say it if it were not true. No, I see it written in your face. That it

was which unmanned me when first I saw you—the close resemblance between you. Her brother! Oh, thrice happy man! Had she been my sister, never had I been thus!”

Once again the blood dyed the brow and neck of the young priest, but he spoke not a word; for few knew how dear to him had always been his affectionate, merry little sister! and his heart throbbed nervously as he thought of her now, perhaps dying, having given her life for another—he not near to aid her. There was a long pause, during which Father Basil fed, soothed, and comforted the invalid. But when the feverish light had somewhat faded from his eyes, it was plainly to be seen how weak, exhausted, and emaciated the sick man was.

“How terribly he must have suffered!” thought the watcher. “He cannot last long. And yet from what I gather he has a statement of importance to unfold ere he leaves this world for ever. For dear Bertie’s sake I must do for him what I can whilst life lasts. You are very tired, my friend,” he said, turning to Manfred; “will you rest awhile? After that you will be better able to think and speak, and tell me all that troubles you.”

“Yes, I am very tired; but I have been thinking even now. It is strange how clearly I can recall to my mind events which before I had almost forgotten. Some few years ago, when your sister was a bright, beautiful schoolgirl, I encountered her, and incurred her displeasure; for which I received the prompt reprimand I deserved. But even as, snubbed and cowed, I stood before her,

some instinct made me feel that, though strangers, a day would dawn, sooner or later, when we should meet again, and she would play an active part in my destiny !”

“This is all very strange,” soliloquised Father Basil, somewhat wearily ; “and yet, after all, it is often wise to allow sick men to ramble on as they list. There are frequent snatches of truth in their ravings, from which one may catch a clearer vision of their character and history. He scarcely seems to recognise my presence at all, poor fellow, as he rambles on to himself.”

“Never had I seen a face before,” continued Manfred, breathing heavily, “which revealed in its intensity of expression such high-souled purity and generosity of purpose. I inquired her parentage, and learned with no surprise of the noble race from which she sprang ; but for six years I was preoccupied by a basely dishonest scheme. My avarice and greed being in a measure satiated, everything having turned out according to my wishes and endeavours, I found leisure to trace out the destiny of her whom I felt to be the very antithesis of myself. One day I found myself in an old country town close beside her home, and there I made the necessary inquiries. I learned that the beautiful young lady of whom I spoke had made a rare hash of her life ; she had committed a most foolish and irreparable act—one which would close to her the doors of her home for ever. Also that a brother of hers had first set her the pernicious example ; and that the behaviour of the two of them was a sore blow to their family. Filled with

rage and disappointment I risked no more inquiries, but turned from my informant and hurriedly left the place.

“Never more could I believe in virtue again ! There was no such thing in the world. After all, my life was no worse than my neighbours. So I tried to persuade myself, and had almost succeeded when (to make the story as short as possible), after a long and weary illness in a foreign country, I opened my eyes to see a strange face—so sweet and gracious in its pitiful charity, as it bent over me, that once more I was spell-bound. In spite of myself, I was forced to own that perhaps, after all, disinterested virtue might exist on earth.”

Several times during this recital Father Basil frowned, and a look of annoyance had flitted across his face ; but he said nothing, allowing Manfred to ramble on as he listed, hoping that the exertion of talking and thinking might weary the man and cause him to fall into the sleep he so much needed.

“But I was hardened,” continued Manfred. “How could I recognise in the patient nun before me the proud girl who had once so deeply impressed me ? In my heart of hearts I tried to despise her calling ; I treated her with scorn—even as a menial ; and she but smiled, and redoubled her charitable exertions. If I spoke or boasted of wealth and power, she turned upon me eyes filled with pity and compassion ; so, baffled and beaten, I ceased to speak. I watched and studied her. I measured my life by hers. Of wealth she had none, yet she wanted for nothing ; I had made huge sacrifices to attain happiness, and yet had

never for one instant grasped it. What had she done to win it? For whether well or sick, weary or gay, peace, joy, and serenity lived in her heart and shone from her countenance. There is much to tell, Father; but I am growing weary and my voice is tired. I was stubborn and hard to conquer, but at last I am totally subdued. If I fall asleep," murmured the sick man faintly, "I shall not sleep for long, and should you leave me, return again soon; for I have still my vow to fulfil, and cannot rest until it is accomplished. How strange it all seems to me now; she might well wish me to linger as I spoke of Baron Court. Little did I dream whom I was then addressing." His voice grew gradually slower and weaker, until at last it entirely ceased, and he fell into a heavy sleep.

In a few minutes Father Basil arose quietly, and finding old Pierre, bade him watch by the sick-man's side until his return.

"I shall not be long," he said; "I go to see Sister Marguerite. But should the sufferer awake, and call for me, send a messenger to acquaint me instantly of the fact."

CHAPTER XXII.

FATHER BASIL DE WOODVILLE lost no time in traversing the distracted streets. He knew well where the little Convent stood, and chose the shortest cuts and least frequented route. He passed many groups of excited men and women; but, serious and preoccupied, he was neither noticed nor accosted by any of them.

His face had lost its early freshness; the once laughing eyes looked darker, steadier, more thoughtful; and the features bore a more marked and manly appearance. There was, in fact, an expression of thought and purpose about his person and bearing in contrast with the sunny, careless Percy of old. His was a face that to see was to trust. His quick, impatient knock at the Convent door was answered by Ma Sœur in person, who, hurriedly sent for by the younger Superioress, had just arrived to find her dearly loved Sister Marguerite not only terribly ill, but unconscious also.

"How is she, Sister?" inquired the priest in a low tone, as he paused an instant within the little passage and scanned the nun's face anxiously. Ma Sœur's face expressed more concern than she was aware of as she shook her head and replied: "I

fear that she is very ill. Come and see for yourself; she is in the little parlour."

They entered the darkened room on tiptoe; and whilst Father Basil took the proffered chair beside the improvised bed, Ma Sœur stood at the foot of it, and looked gravely and steadily at them both. Her heart was full of sorrow and sympathy for the brother, as she noted the spasm that passed over his countenance and the strong effort he made to subdue his feelings as, bending low, he gazed fondly and sorrowfully at the sweet flushed face resting so calmly and helplessly before them. Neither was surprised to see her thus, for both knew full well how strongly governed by generous impulses was the heart of their favourite; and that if duty or charity called for her aid, Sister Marguerite would never hesitate or weigh the cost to herself. She was one of the very few who knew how to give to God, and never count the cost. Still, the blow had fallen suddenly at last, and their hearts ached while they trembled for the issue.

For a long time the brother bent over the suffering form of his sister. His heart was too full for words as he listened to her painful breathing and recalled to his mind the days when the proud high-minded girl was wont to rebuke, pet, or coax him, just as the fancy seized her, and they two were almost all in all to each other.

"Poor little Bertie!" he murmured; and yet he was never prouder of her than now, when she lay there, a martyr to charity. Would she be permitted to rally and know him? It was a terrible trial to meet her thus, after all their anticipated

pleasure in a reunion ; and fearfully in earnest he looked when, as though moved by some strong internal impulse, and oblivious of all around, he sank upon his knees by her side, and, covering his face with his hands, cried out in the agony of his soul, " My God, she is Thine ! May Thy holy will be done ! " Oh, words fraught with such sublime and heroic power, and yet oft-times so hard to utter ! There is a soothing balm in the very agony wherewith you wring the hearts of men as they breathe you—raising and ennobling us, making saints of the most abandoned, and drawing us all very near to God.

When Father Basil rose from his knees it was with the dew of a sweet submission filling his heart, and strongly resolved to endure without a murmur the decrees of Heaven. His eyes were dry, he spoke little ; but Ma Sœur read his heart aright, and knew what he was suffering.

Dr. Arno wandered restlessly in and out of the room. Inwardly he was exceedingly distressed, outwardly he was annoyed and irritable. He had not succeeded in his charitable efforts to rescue Manfred and his brave deliverer without suffering on his own part. His usually ruddy face was scorched and burnt, and his hands caused him considerable pain ; but to do the kind man justice, it was not so much his own sufferings which distressed and annoyed him as those of the poor little nun before him.

" Well, Father," he inquired in a gruff, surly tone, " how did you find that miserable Englishman—the cause of all our trouble ? Just as though

there were not enough sorrow and grief to weep over at times like these ! Did you make anything out of the creature, or was he as sullen and uncommunicative as ever ? ” Not pausing for a reply, he stooped over the bed ; and taking up carefully and tenderly one of the injured little hands, now enveloped in cotton wool, he continued, with tears in his eyes :

“ This is one of the very saddest things I have ever known ; and yet I have watched weak, innocent babes suffer and die, and seen strong men fall at their posts. But this one—physically so sensitive and delicate—had the bravest, most unselfish heart I have ever known ; and to think that a precious life like hers should be sacrificed for that useless, stupid countryman of yours ! Bah ! it unmans me when I think of it. Surely she has friends in your cold-hearted country who will mourn her death ? ”

“ But she is not dead yet ! ” interrupted her brother hastily. “ Nor is she in danger of it, surely ? ”

“ No ”—testily—“ but except for me she might have been. I tell you both, that had you seen what I witnessed it would have wrung your hearts with such pity and admiration that to your dying day you would never have forgotten it. I myself caught but a glimpse of her now and again as, driven by the wind the fierce tongues of fire were lifted upwards, sideways, and seemingly inwards upon her, while she knelt upon the threshold, her brave form enveloped and framed as with a canopy of purgatorial flames, and striving to force before

her to a place of safety that heavy burden of helpless humanity. I saw her sensitive body shrink, in natural dread and terror, from the cruel flames; but I saw also the weak frame, compelled by her noble spirit, do its part. When at last the opportunity offered, and the unconscious burden safely reached me, I saw her fall with outstretched hands, as though overcome with exhaustion, pleading at last for help on her own account. Oh, Father!" said the old man, as he leant against the bed for support, which shook with his sobs, "it is barely three months since I buried my only daughter; and in this sad vision I seemed to see her dear face, and to hear her sweet voice calling to me from out the purgatorial flames. God help me, it was a trying ordeal."

"Doctor," said Father Basil, coming forward and placing his hand with a filial caress upon the old man's shoulder, "may God bless you for ever for this generous act. I little knew that we owed all this to you. From henceforth the name of Dr. Arno shall be uttered with life-long gratitude and affection by her family. And deem us not all so base and unfeeling that we cannot value at its proper worth what you have done to-day."

"Nay, Father," protested the doctor, "Heaven knows I seek no thanks for aught I have done for her. Bear with an old man who has seen the roughest and worst side of life, if he breaks down at the sight of such courage and devotion. Perhaps the undue excitement, or the privilege of being able to rescue her, has unnerved me. If

only I dared examine the internal injury she has sustained from the falling debris, I should feel much more satisfied; but, at present, she cannot endure to be moved or even touched, and I must wait as patiently as possible until she regains a little strength. Poor child! See, she moves! Speak to her, Father. There is a chance that she may be just conscious enough to understand you."

Father Basil knelt down by the bedside and bent over her, saying: "I—your brother Percy—am close beside you, Bertie. Speak, dear, and tell me if there is anything you wish for."

A faint, sweet smile broke over her face, as though she understood his words and their meaning was very sweet to her. Then the flushed brow contracted as though perplexed by painful thought and memories, and in short, uneven gasps she strove to speak.

"Tell Marie and Madge I want them. . . . Poor Edmund Leadbitter! . . . Seek the Englishman. . . . He will confess. . . . He knows all. . . . Save poor Leadbitter!" Her mind suddenly became clouded again, and she spoke no more.

"Well, what does she say, Father?" impatiently asked the doctor. "Can you understand her meaning?"

"Hardly," responded her brother, as he rose slowly to his feet, astonished and bewildered by his sister's words. He stood with one arm thrown across his chest supporting the other, the hand of which clasped his brow, whilst his eyes stared into

vacancy. "Edmund Leadbitter, the supposed forger or felon," he muttered ; "once the friend of my brother, who, by the way, always swore he was unjustly condemned. Is it possible that this strange Englishman can prove poor Leadbitter's innocence? If so, even as my sister bids me, I must hasten to his side at once, and leave no stone unturned to aid him and restore to him his honour and good name."

"Dr. Arno," he said solemnly, looking up suddenly, "it is imperative that I return to the sick man at once. There is more in this than meets the eye. There is a mystery somewhere, and the sooner I am able to solve it the better. Indeed, I begin to think that an innocent man has been condemned and made to suffer wrongfully ; and, what is more, I believe that my sister here has by some means come to a knowledge of the fact, for the sick Englishman seems to hold the key of the secret. If so, I can now understand why she used such strenuous efforts to save him. Can you oblige me with the name of some notary who would kindly accompany me?"

"That I will, right gladly," replied the doctor, interested even in spite of his dislike to Manfred. "Take this card"—across which he hastily wrote something in pencil—"and call at the address which I have given you. You will find Monsieur Camard not only a very able and clever practitioner, but a man who understands and speaks your language like a native ; moreover, his heart is in the right place. *Au revoir*, Father. Make all possible speed, for I fear there is but little time to lose."

Father Basil needed not a second bidding. The words of his sister had stirred a strange chord in his heart. He felt instinctively that she had done her utmost—perhaps had given even her life—that wrong might be righted, and it remained for him now to pick up the tangled threads and complete her task. Turning, he cast one fond look, fraught with grave tenderness and anxiety, towards the unconscious sufferer, then whispering earnestly his last instructions to Ma Sœur, seized his hat and hastily left the Convent.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"It is well that life holds not many such days," he meditated, as he stepped into the open street. "The time has flown so rapidly that I know not even what hour of the day it is. Stay! that is surely the *Angelus* bell. Poor Paris, I marvel there is a soul left mindful to ring it."

Presently he drew forth the card which Dr. Arno had given him and scanned the address. It led him in the very opposite direction to that in which Manfred lay. If only a *fiacre* would pass that he might hail it and thus hasten his journey—for he was not very sure of his bearings.

" 'Tell Marie and Madge I want them.' Yes, dear little sufferer, they shall come to you. Had it not all broken upon me so suddenly and unexpectedly, I should have thought of summoning them sooner. Thank God, here comes a vehicle of some sort;" and he ran forward to meet it. Fortunately it was unoccupied.

"Drive as quickly as you can to the rue Ste. L—— and call at the first telegraph office that you pass by the way," he cried as he sprang in. He flung the door to, and sinking upon the seat laid his hat beside him. Passing his hands over his

brow, he sought to reduce to order his startled and confused faculties.

The nearer they drove to the city the more thronged he found the unsettled streets. The panic and excitement of the previous night had left obvious and terrible traces. Twelve hours ago, all around had been a frightful scene of carnage and excitement. Father Basil was too preoccupied with his own thoughts to pay much attention to what was or had been passing. His patience was almost exhausted as he realised how impossible it was for the lumbering vehicle, with its worn-out, jaded steed, to make speedy progress.

Frequently their course was interrupted by the necessity of turning into side streets in order to avoid obstructions in the shape of shattered barricades, beside which lay frequently the bodies of dead Communists deserted by their comrades. It was, therefore, no small relief to him when the *fiacre* at last drew up at a post-office. He could at least despatch telegrams to his brother and Lady O'Hagan. He had no time to be delicate in his wording of them ; they were brief, but to the point.

He found the notary just about to enter his private carriage and drive towards the very quarter in which Manfred lay. Father Basil accosted him eagerly, presenting to him Dr. Arno's card. The notary at once offered the priest a seat in his own carriage, and listened with grave and kind interest to his story as they drove along the boulevards. Father Basil's hopes and spirits rose as the invigorating breeze fanned his burning brow : for they were rushing now with all possible speed to the

sick man's side. Dr. Arno had spoken truly when he said that the notary had his heart in the right place; and one was almost as anxious and interested as the other by the time they reached the ruined house.

Manfred was lying awake and perfectly conscious as the two men entered the room. Looking up almost brightly, he stretched out his feeble arm towards Father Basil with a gesture of welcome, asking anxiously after Sister Marguerite.

"How is she, Father? Do not tell me that she is dead!" he gasped, when he received no immediate reply.

"She is not well enough to come and visit you herself," he answered guardedly; "but she has great confidence in your honour, and bade us hasten to your side in order to note down in the public interest all you have to relate to us."

"Yes, Father de Woodville, I understand very clearly what you mean; and, God helping me, I will keep my vow to her. Come nearer, both of you, so that you may hear and understand all that I have to tell. My name is Harold Manfred."

"Good heavens!" broke in Father Basil, in astonishment, as he gazed in wonder upon the wreck of humanity before him; "are you, then, poor Leadbitter's half-brother?"

"Yes, I am he! I am also the accomplice of a scoundrel, who worked his ruin and ultimately cast him into a felon's cell."

Manfred continued his tale in as firm a tone as he could command, whilst the notary took down his depositions. Never seeking to justify or

exonerate his own conduct, Manfred summoned all remaining strength of mind and body, and continued to unfold the whole of his base story, the main facts of which he had already related to Sister Marguerite. Having concluded, he heaved a deep sigh and exclaimed :

“There ! Make any use of this that you think fit ; but I feel happier now than I have done since I was a little child. Only tell me speedily what course you purpose to pursue towards my brother ?”

“It will be a matter of time,” replied Monsieur Camard thoughtfully.

“But I have sworn to you that he is absolutely innocent. Thomas also swore on his death-bed, and attested the fact in writing, that he himself tampered and altered the cheque, though at the time I knew it not.”

“We believe you fully ; but even so, his country, by whom he was judged and condemned, must equally be persuaded of his innocence.”

“Oh, Edmund ! and you have already waited so long ! Promise me, on your word of honour,” he implored in a trembling voice, addressing Monsieur Camard, “that you will hasten to your utmost the moment of his release, and never rest until it is accomplished.”

“I do promise. It is a service that accords well with my inclination. I think it possible that even now it may be useful to send a telegram to the Governor of the prison, urging him to treat him with greater care and leniency than usual, while this confession is submitted to the Home Secretary.”

"It shall be done," cried Father Basil joyfully, "for I will send it in my own name of De Woodville, which may carry some weight. But where is Mrs. Leadbitter, the poor young bride of two days, who was so cruelly divided from her husband?"

Manfred cast a look of incredulity at the priest as he answered slowly :

"Do you mean to imply, Father de Woodville, that you are not aware where Lady Leadbitter resides? Her husband is a baronet, remember!"

"No, indeed; I have not the very faintest notion as to her whereabouts; nor yet to my knowledge have I ever seen or heard of her."

"Then"—still incredulously—"your sister-in-law, Lady de Woodville, has contrived to keep her secret more securely than I deemed it possible for any woman to do! Who is it, think you, that lives in such close seclusion at the Western Lodge at Baron Court?"

"I cannot tell you who she is; but some one I believe of the name of—Mac something."

"Just so: MacDermot! That was her maiden name: her married name is Leadbitter—Edmund's wife, Lady Leadbitter!"

"Impossible!" urged Father Basil, shaking his head. "It cannot be! How do you know it?"

"How do I know it?" reiterated Manfred vehemently. "Because last autumn I was for a day and two nights a guest at Baron Court. It was the shooting season, and I went as the friend of Sir Hugh Lonsdale. During that short stay we had occasion to seek shelter from the pouring rain in

that same lodge; and whilst so doing (I blush to relate it), knowing that the owner was out, I pried into her inner and private apartment and discovered—to my surprise and horror—a large painted portrait of my brother as I had seen him last. You still doubt, Father? Indeed, you need not; for two of his paintings, initialled by his own hand, hung upon the wall; and his old ‘Strad,’ bearing his name in full, rested near his portrait. If you doubt me still, go and inquire of old John Ryder, the coachman.”

“But how can this be?” interrupted Father Basil. You, Harold Manfred—the very man who was enjoying the property wrested, as my brother thought, so unjustly from Edmund Lead-bitter, a guest beneath De Woodville’s roof! Pray how did he receive you?”

“You see I was never aware, until you yourself informed me, that my brother and yours had been on such terms of intimacy. It appears now that it was fortunate his stay in Ireland was unavoidably lengthened by a day or two, thus preventing an unpleasant meeting under his own roof. As I was a friend of Sir Hugh Lonsdale and his own guest, it might have been a little awkward. However, having made that discovery in the Western Lodge, I feigned illness, and quitted the place as speedily as possible.”

“It is altogether marvellous,” pondered the priest, “and yet it is credible. Nevertheless, it still remains a fact that Lady de Woodville has not the slightest idea as to the identity of her quiet lodge-keeper. Only so late as February last we discussed

the matter together, wondering who on earth she could be."

"You will find that I am right," sighed Manfred wearily, for he was suffering intensely. The terrible excitement of narrating his own disgraceful history had entailed an almost superhuman effort, and now the reaction was fast setting in. Both men were startled by the painful pallor which was stealing over his features, and they welcomed with gratitude the advent of busy, florid Dr. Arno as, panting with subdued curiosity as much as for want of breath, he burst open the door.

"Why, here you are!" he exclaimed; "what a hunt I have had for you!" Then, observing quickly the ghastly look upon the sick man's face, he said aside: "Is everything concluded satisfactorily? He is bad, and probably will not last long."

"His signature to these papers is necessary," observed Monsieur Camard seriously. "Will you be good enough to sign these valuable documents for us, Mr. Manfred?"

"With all my heart, and would that I could assist in any other way to undo all the wrong I have done."

Supported in the arms of Father Basil, Manfred sat up and feebly penned his name. The letters grew firmer as he wrote, adding a line or two of bitter condemnation of his own conduct and of contrite sorrow for the base part he had played.

"You will show it to *her*," he pleaded, as, white and exhausted, he sank back upon the pillow.

"I will tell her how nobly you have behaved,

how truthfully you have acted, and how patiently and uncomplainingly you have borne your sufferings. Now, doctor, do see if you cannot afford him some relief."

"No, no! It is my foot that has caused me such intolerable pain. You can do nothing for it now, doctor. It will kill me, I know, and I do not seem to care how soon. But you will tell her, Father de Woodville, how faithfully I kept my vow, how very contrite I was at the end, and that with my dying breath I blessed God for the lessons of true Christian virtue that through her He had taught me?"

"Indeed, I will tell her everything." And Father Basil seated himself close to the sick man, and taking a firm grip of his hand, continued: "I promise you faithfully that she shall know all—how brave, truthful, and patient you have been: and will she not thank God for it!"

"I know it, and she will pray for me too, if that can avail me anything."

"Are you speaking of Sister Marguerite?" interposed the doctor, as he paused in dressing Manfred's foot; "for I came to tell you that she seemed easier, and has fallen into a natural sleep."

By this time he had succeeded in uncovering entirely the obstinate wound, and sat examining it very attentively. It needed no great knowledge or medical skill to perceive that mortification had already set in, and that the poor man's hours were numbered. He was somewhat surprised and disconcerted at first, but endeavoured to disguise his feelings when he observed that Manfred's eyes were

went steadily upon him. Turning to his friend, Monsieur Camard, he said rather significantly :

“It would be as well, Monsieur, if you endeavoured to recollect everything—every point of necessity or consequence bearing upon this important case—*now* ; it would not be advisable to defer things for long, seeing that the patient will probably wish for rest soon.”

“There is still one thing,” said the notary, with an intelligent glance at Dr. Arno—“one thing which seems to have escaped our attention. In the course of your narrative, Mr. Manfred, you informed us that the lawyer Thomas before dying had indited, or had caused to be written, a full statement as to how he had himself altered the cheque, and, in fact, done all that for which Sir Edmund Leadbitter was unjustly condemned. Now where are those most important documents to be found?”

“Yes, where are they?” mechanically murmured the sick man. “Where can they be?”

“Try and recollect exactly where you placed them,” urged Father Basil, pressing the man’s head firmly, as though to recall him more fully to the present. “You put them somewhere for safety. Where was it?”

“I know I hid them somewhere away from the Thomas family. They were a grasping lot. . . . They made out I owed them money ; so, not caring to live at the Abbey Towers myself, I let it to them at a nominal rent, on the condition that they neither injured nor sold anything upon the estate.”

"You are sure that you did not destroy the papers?" asked Monsieur Camard.

"No, I am positive I did not—absolutely certain I did not," he reiterated with some spirit. "Because on the release of my brother Edmund I had always resolved that, come what might, I would hand them over to him. Ah, gentlemen, he had such a proud, though generous nature, that I felt convinced if I but explained matters to him and threw myself upon his mercy, he would not only be ready to forgive me, but, in establishing his own innocence, would have regard to his brother's name." After this sudden burst Manfred seemed to collapse and to forget the allusion to the papers.

"Rouse yourself once more, Mr. Manfred, and for your brother's sake tell us where you hid the confession of that wretched Thomas," said Father Basil.

"Of course; I must not forget that," he answered, striving to concentrate his faculties once more. "Before the Thomas family went to live at the Abbey Towers I kept those papers in the secret drawer of an old bureau in Sir Hugh's library. Then where on earth did I put them?" There ensued a painful pause of a full minute; after which a sudden light seemed to dawn upon him, and he said excitedly:

"Ah, thank goodness? Now I remember where they are. Do you, one or all, go to the old Abbey ruins and enter the nave; then walk towards the end of the last transept. There at your feet lies a large broken slab of stone. The smaller portion of this you can raise, and, if you dig a few feet beneath,

you will discover a small enamelled tin box. The key is on my bunch. Open it, and you will find the things for which you search."

Father Basil and Monsieur Camard looked at each other curiously; they were inclined to believe that the poor man's mind was wandering. It really sounded too romantic. "It sounds like a fairy tale," smiled the priest aside. "Are we all expected to go in a body and dig?"

"I, for one, shall go," said M. Camard quietly. "My word of honour is pledged to this sick man, not to leave a stone—be it slab or otherwise—unturned, by which I can hasten his brother's release; in fact, though his story is full of romance from beginning to end, the poor fellow seems so rational and earnest—and dying men do not as a rule tell lies—that I am fully disposed to believe what he says. Moreover, I am all anxiety to get the telegram off to the jail. Who knows, but it may in some measure mitigate the poor prisoner's sufferings? I shall never rest until he is safely out of that hole! Will you attend to it at once, Father?"

"No. My duty is here. I cannot leave him now: but we have pen and papers; I will write the message, if you will see to its speedy despatch."

"I will go at once, for I cannot remain here longer. My horses are impatient, and I am due elsewhere. Good-bye. You know where to find me, if I am wanted." M. Camard bowed, and hurried from the old building.

"You can do no more for me—can you?" asked Manfred, in a weary voice.

"No, Monsieur. I regret to say it, but no power on earth can heal your foot now," blurted out Dr. Arno, speaking abruptly in the effort to conceal his emotion.

"Thank you. I knew it well. Believe me, death for me has lost all its horrors. Leave me with Father de Woodville, and trouble no more about this worthless life. I could never have believed it possible that the pleasures of life, for which we barter so much, could appear so worthless and trivial as they do when viewed from the standpoint of the grave. Yet stay one moment longer, Dr. Arno. You have been very good to me, and did I not once swear that your services should not go unrequited? Take a sheet of paper, Father de Woodville, and write down what I dictate to you; it shall be my last will and testament.

"'I leave to Dr. Henri Arno, of Paris'—you can fill in the full address later—'who has so kindly attended me during my last illness, the only landed property I possess, viz., the Manor Farm and house adjoining Sir E. Leadbitter's estate, known as Abbey Towers, in Yorkshire, to do with as he pleases. The furniture, jewels, and any other valuables that may of right belong to me, are to be sold for the benefit of the Sisters of Charity.'"

Then, for the last time, he strove to sign his name; and, having done so, he handed the paper to Dr. Arno, saying: "Now, good-bye, doctor. Take care of that and leave me in peace. I would finish with this world, now, and turn my thoughts

to higher things. Don't you leave also, dear Father de Woodville. Stay and help me to the end !”

“I had no intention of doing so,” said the priest, as he reseated himself by the bedside, after seeing Dr. Arno to the door. “I was but explaining to him the contents of the paper, which he did not understand. Besides, it needed my name as a witness, and I wanted his last instructions regarding you. But come, we have other things to think of, other work to do. Let us ask for help to do it well.”

What those two, left alone in that desolate abode thought of, and what they did, is known to none save themselves and God. But the fresh, keen breeze had lulled ; the very sun, which Manfred deemed so sluggish in rising, had sunk to rest amid a bed of crimson and golden clouds, whilst a faint light glimmered in the east, heralding the approach of the queen of the night, ere one of them, dazed, hungry, and exhausted, emerged slowly and thoughtfully from that desolate building. He had devoted all his power and energy to preparing the soul of poor Manfred to meet his God. The weary but contrite spirit had found rest at last.

Some months later there rose a tablet over Manfred's grave ; and the letters traced upon it told of the brave deed performed by the Englishman laid below. But his reckless act of daring scarce found an echo of renown in the hearts of his countrymen.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AFTER her wearysome journey, Marion Leadbitter, as we will now call her, passed an uneasy and restless night. She arose early the following morning, feeling overwrought and unrefreshed.

Naturally of a timid and sensitive nature, and, reared as she had been almost entirely in the quiet seclusion of her mountain home, with scarce any friends or companions save her gentle mother, to whom she was so devoted, it would have seemed that she was totally unfit to be suddenly dragged before a hard and pitiless world and made to share the sorrow and ignominy which fell to the lot of her unfortunate young husband. But the sea of woe, into the dark waves of which she found herself so suddenly plunged, roused the fighting power of love and self-sacrifice within her. In her little barque of silent but loyal love she would breast the billows of scorn. Since men had so mercilessly and wrongfully condemned her husband, to Heaven alone would she look for love and aid. God's will should mark her way, and in His own good time He would land them both upon a shore of love and hope. She would work—yes, night and day she would work—but she felt it must be in silence and seclusion. Nature would fail to

support the brave spirit within if she must face daily scorn or pity. But Heaven was kind to her, and even beyond her utmost expectations did it come to her assistance now. How often is it that a kind action brings its own reward even in this life!

The day before Mr. MacDermot died, his heart was filled by a terrible anxiety as to the future of his poor little daughter. As he cast about in his mind for the memory of some friend to whom he could urge her to turn in her hour of need, one image alone rose before his mental vision, one form alone stood out in bold relief; and his eyes, dimmed by weakness and the shadow of death, dwelt upon the picture with hope. It was the form of a tall, slender girl, who, looking up to him with shy, timid grace, said in a firm but pleading voice, "I will sing for you." It was only the memory of our old friend, dear Madge, who in all her girlish reserve and beauty visited the concert-manager in his last hours and seemed to fill his sinking heart with faith and courage. He felt sure that she would never turn a deaf ear to the cry of his daughter in her hour of need.

"Marion, darling," he said, "something tells me that I shall not be with you long. I will ask of you one promise before I die."

"And what is that, dear," she asked gently. "If it is possible surely it shall be done."

"It is this, dear child. When I have left you, and you are alone, go and seek Lady O'Hagan. Tell her that you are my daughter, and ask her, in memory of days gone by, to befriend you."

"Lady O'Hagan," she repeated, in a slow, puzzled tone ; "who is she, father?"

"She is, like yourself, my darling, gently born ; but once she was more like you still, for she was very poor and in great distress. Then it was that I was able to be kind to her. Recall the fact to her mind, and, I feel assured, she will gladly assist and befriend you. Surely you remember that night in Edinburgh, about eleven years ago—you were a child of thirteen or fourteen at the time—when I was suddenly called upon to arrange a concert at which Royalty were to be present, and my *prima donna*, upon whose famous voice so much hung, fell sick. We were at our wits' end to replace her, when, to our amazement, a sweet modest girl, with a voice like an angel, came to me and offered her services. Do you not recall that I accepted them, and that, singing as she did—for the life of her mother as it were—the concert was a marvellous success? I was enabled to aid her substantially in her private struggles and poverty, and never in all my life did I experience such pure joy as in that hour when I was permitted to help and brighten the life of that brave Scotch girl."

"Father, I remember her well. I can see her now as she stood, so tall and graceful, dressed in the simplest of mourning robes, and casting her sweet clear eyes over her audience, filled her throat and sang with a wild pathos that might have melted a heart of stone. Yes, father, I will go to her. And though, thank God, her days of want and poverty are over, still, as in her hour of trial, she was found

both brave and able to endure, so she will not turn from a sister in distress, but will, I am convinced, encourage me also to steadfast combat and endurance."

Thus it came to pass that, when Marion Leadbitter found herself really alone and stranded, with no means of support, save the toil of her inexperienced hands, she sought Lady O'Hagan; and without wishing to presume or impose upon her kindness by informing her that she was the wife of Edmund Leadbitter, as well as the concert manager's daughter, she contented herself with telling her she was the latter, and entreating her, by the memory of her father, to procure for her, if possible, work and seclusion somewhere in the South of England.

Gladly our brave Scotch girl rose to the occasion, and contrived to stir up in the warm Irish heart of her old school friend, Marie, such a practical interest in the forlorn young wife, that, putting their pretty heads together, they were not long in discovering, on the beautiful estate of Baron Court, the very things poor Marion needed.

Yet it was reserved for the ears of England's daughter alone—for her whose very life was devoted to deeds of charity and compassion—to hear the true history of her life. From Sister Marguerite she drank, in return, deep and welcome sympathy, listening to words of trust and hope in God and the future.

So the "Three daughters of the United Kingdom," though separated by distance, were oft-times bound together in spirit and love; and innumerable

were the acts of charity and kindness performed by their united efforts.

As Marion sat, on that memorable morning after her journey, by the open window of her humble lodging, one elbow resting on the sill, while her weary head rested on her hand, she was conscious of feeling unusually lonely and dispirited. "Was something appalling about to happen?" she asked herself. If not, then how should she account for the sense of fear and oppression which beset her? She raised her eyes for the fiftieth time and scanned, with a look of mingled sadness and weariness, a huge building which stood grimly aloof from the rest of the habitations of man, its grey lines showing hard against the golden-tinted background of the brilliant morning sun.

No graceful curve of turret bower,
Entwined by roses fair;
No gilded spire, or noble tower,
Stood out reflected there.

All was cold, bare, and cheerless,
Hope scarce lingered near;
'Twas built to crush the stout and fearless,
To make them cringe and fear.

She had chosen these apartments because from their windows a good view could be procured of that hateful building; for somewhere within those cruel walls was lodged the best and truest heart on earth, whom three long years ago, that very day, she had vowed to love "until death us do part." Nobly had she kept that vow. If he was dear to her in the bright springtime of their youth, when, full of life and strength, he had bade her rest upon

his protecting love, surely to her true woman's heart he was dearer by far now, when, in the hard winter of his sorrow, he must turn to her for protection and care.

Who but she remained to grieve for him now? Who to cling to and defend him? Who to work and pray for him? None but his own little wife; and, God helping her, she would not fail in the duty, no matter how heart-breaking the task. Yes, what if all the world shun ed and despised him, she would but defy it and love him the more. With an air of defiance she pushed the chair from her and rose with spirit. "I will defy and dare them all!" she cried. "He shall see my face—shall read there endurance and faithful, untiring love.

With quick step and agitated breath she paced the room, until a little maid brought in her breakfast tray. Then, once more donning bonnet and cloak, she stole down the narrow staircase, and passed through the open door into the fresh morning air. She knew in which direction lay the quarries where the convicts worked, and also that the road thither lay chiefly o er waste and uneven ground. Drawing her veil more closely forward, she wandered on in unmolested silence, and soon left in the distance the small, prim row of houses from which she had emerged. There was one dreamy, sleepy hollow, close to the quarries, through which they all must pass. There she determined to ensconce herself.

There had been a slight frost during the night, which had touched with gleaming silver the threads

of myriads of shining webs ; and these hung in gay festoons from branch to branch, or lay shining in gorgeous patterns upon the moss.

Close to an old turnpike gate, through which all the men must pass, stood a low wall, built up of sods, and upon this she climbed. Drawing a book from her pocket, she threw back her veil and seemed intent upon its pages. She looked like a nurse who, worn out with midnight watches, sought in the cool, fresh morning air, strength for her worn nerves. And so, with ever quickening pulse and fast beating heart, poor Marion watched and waited.

The members of the small week-day congregation that attended Father Lawrence's church were somewhat surprised to find themselves so late for Mass that morning ; or was it that the priest's clocks were disgracefully forward ? At any rate, the service was almost over when, by rights, they said, it should have but begun. " Father Lawrence," said the Brother, in answer to inquiries, " is busily engaged ; he has not time to attend to anything save a sick-call—leastwise, that's what he said. He scarcely touched his breakfast, but seized his hat and stick and left the house. I don't know where he's gone ! "

Though he frequently wore his habit in the prison bounds, Father Lawrence seldom used it in the more public streets ; and this morning he had gone out in his ordinary coat.

" Shall I be too late after all ? " he said hurriedly, taking out his watch and looking at it. " And will she be there, I wonder ? Perhaps not. At any

rate, I should like to see how poor '75' is this morning. If unfit for work, perhaps he will give in and let me have him sent to the infirmary to-day. Ah, surely that regular stream of heads in front, now mounting the knoll, is a band of convicts. Yes, poor fellows, it is they, sure enough; and if I cut across this field I shall yet be first at the quarry gate." Instinct seemed to tell him that, should the poor wife be there at all, Nature would have led her to this lonely spot.

He gained his ground, and was walking quietly on, when his heart gave a sudden bound. "Whose slender form was that seated upon the bank, her very attitude expressive of bowed and stricken fear? God help them if it's she!" he thought. "I will walk quietly up behind; she is too intent to know I'm near."

How faint she was growing. "My God!" she gasped, "they're coming now; I hear their tread!" An instant afterwards the leading ranks, closely guarded by strong, armed warders, had stared at her and passed by. Tramp-tramp, clink-clank, they still moved on. Oh, whither had her woman's courage fled? She scarce dared raise her eyes. Would he too be chained? and could she bear to see him thus?

File by file they passed, those desperate men, in their garb of derision. Last of all, when already she had given up hope, she saw her husband's face. What a contrast to those of his companions! Worn it was, and sad; but, alone among the visages of those wretches, it bore no stigma of shame. For one electric moment their eyes met.

The convict's pale face flushed, then turned deadly white. He fell to the ground in a swoon.

Marion bounded from her seat. She forgot everything save that her husband lay, to all appearance, dead before her. But a firm hand held her back, and a kind voice whispered in her ear :

"Marion Leadbitter, my child, hold back ! Be calm, be firm, and all may yet be well." Then turning to the warder, Father Lawrence asked in a louder voice : "He is not dead ? This lady is weak ; her nerves are unstrung ; she feared the man was dying."

"No, sir, I think he has but fainted. He has done it before," replied the warder, calmly. "He is not fit for work like this !"

"Let me assist you to revive him ; then we will lead or carry him back to jail. He ought to be in the infirmary," continued the priest, seriously.

"I really think he ought, if he is to live at all. It's a shame to work the man like this ; he wasn't built for it."

Once more Marion's courage returned. It came like a touch of magic, when she heard the name by which no tongue had addressed her for three long weary years. Who was he that dared or cared to breathe it now ? Surely a friend of her best beloved—of her husband. Yes, she could trust the voice that called her that. She would strive to calm her throbbing brain—to school her heart to further endurance yet. Might she not even now get near him ?

Her woman's wit came timely to her aid.

Stepping aside, she seized a hollow stone and filled it at a small running stream. Then, timidly, she bore it to the sufferer. Father Lawrence knelt upon the ground. He had raised the poor man's head, and now let it rest upon his knee. But, when he marked the wife's trembling hand, he took the water from her and poured it down the prisoner's throat. "Take this," he said to the warder kindly, "and please fill it once again." When the man had turned his back, he spoke hastily to Marion :

"Marion, poor child ! this should never have been ! But do not weep. Trust me ; I am Father Lawrence, the prison chaplain, and I will watch and tend him daily. And, believe me, God will help you both." She had only time to bend over the dear, prostrate form before the warder turned again. As she did so, the white rosebud, unperceived, fell from her bosom, and hid itself within the folds of his open shirt. Then, for the sake of the sick man, whose eyelids began to tremble, Marion rose and turned away, lest she should betray him, and so add to his sufferings. She felt more dead than alive, as, choking her grief, she struggled on. Not once did she turn her head to glance at him whom she had left behind. At least, she knew that he was not friendless now ; and she had that good man's assurance that Heaven would aid them yet.

Meanwhile, the prisoner slowly recovered ; and by his friend and the warder was supported back to prison. He looked long at Father Lawrence, but uttered not a word. Nor did he offer the

slightest objection when ordered, almost sternly, by the doctor to the infirmary.

Beat on true hearts, your day of trial is past,
Look up brave eyes, Heaven bids you hope at last.

That night the prisoner slept well, for the bed beneath him was strangely soft and warm. The Governor himself had visited and spoken to him words of hope ; whilst in his frail, weak hands was clasped a sweet white rose.

But Father Lawrence and Marion watched late, for their hearts were full. "Poor child!" he thought, "joy must not kill her!" though it was for very joy she wept. Father de Woodville's telegram had set brave hearts beating and pulses wildly throbbing. Never had the good priest shared such earthly joy as this. Does not the darkest hour herald the dawn?

CHAPTER XXV.

THE great living pulse of human life, with its deafening rumble of steam, commerce and pleasure, was seething and throbbing with its usual force and vigour in our famous city of London, throbbing and beating with such incessant and continuous noise and hurry, as though no power for good or evil could ever again still or calm its noisy beat. Thousands upon thousands of human forms moved to and fro, each face seemingly intent upon that one idea which was uppermost in his or her tiny brain. Still there was one great link of interest that day which more or less bound numerous minds together. The newspapers narrated and discussed in brilliant and excited language how France—in spite of all her late sorrow and disaster—had rallied her remaining strength and forces, and rescued the city of Paris from the degrading and baneful dominion of her own internal enemies. There was joy in our sister city of London at this news, for many had friends in the beleaguered fortress, and felt no small anxiety on their account ; but, above all, the money market of this great nation, so calmly looking on, was visibly affected by the news, and those who had time to pause at all stood about in groups talking with

great animation and hope of the future prospects of commerce and finance.

Yet, not one in all that gay or dingy throng, not one knew or cared, or cast a thought of pity or admiration upon that little soldier—one of England's fairest daughters—who had fallen at her post that day. Such deeds as hers are hidden from the eyes of busy men, but are recorded in the eternal courts above.

It was but a few years since they had courted her. Society had rung with praises of her wealth, her talents, her beauty, until at the sound of a higher voice she had first paused in her brilliant career, then divining its purpose, had listened, and responding cheerfully, obeyed. Casting aside her wealth she bid her friends adieu, and society knew her no more. But others—the poor, the sick, the forlorn, the hopeless, the forgotten ones of God's earth—by them she was known, loved, and blessed. How the world had pitied, almost despised her, for the choice she had made; the best among them had but smiled in their superiority, calling her, "good, but silly." Well, we will not blame them, nor term them shallow in mind or heart; how could such as they understand that it was not *she* who *chose*, but that she was *chosen*? And so they talked and hurried on that bright May day; but none were aware that high above their heads flashed, with electric speed, to the once proud home of this fair daughter, the sad news of her fall and probable decease.

Dear, bright, unselfish and forgotten Sister Marguerite, there are hearts loyal and true that shall mourn you yet!

Telegrams at Oakhome, save for Baron Court, were rare ; and the station-master looked serious and worried after duly deciphering and writing the meaning of this one. Folding the carefully written words within the envelope and securing the latter, he walked with a solemn step to where two small boys were intently occupied in a game of marbles.

"John," he cried, addressing sternly the elder of the two, "stop this tomfoolery and pay attention to what I say to you. Is Jim in the stable at present?"

"Yes, sir, he is ; and saddled too," replied the boy, springing briskly to his feet and pocketing his spoils.

"Then mount him, my lad, and ride quickly with this"—holding out the yellow envelope—"to the Court. Now mind, quickly I say, for it is of most mighty importance. Ask to deliver it yourself, or have it given at once into his Lordship's hands. Do you hear, boy, and do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," said John, with a quick and intelligent look. "I'll get the pony at once, sir."

The station-master watched him pocket the telegram carefully, then, scrambling nimbly upon old Jim's back, gather the reins and apply the whip so freely, that boy and steed were soon out of sight. Then he turned slowly back to the station, muttering to himself, "Poor little Lady ! This is a bad business, very !"

"My eyes ! but it's a rare fine thing to be gentlefolks, and live in grand places like this," said the merry boy, as he cantered up the glorious avenue of chestnuts and beeches, his round face

crimson with the exertion of keeping old Jim up to the mark. "It's fine, this is!"

Earl de Woodville was leisurely strolling about his grounds, admiring the fresh green buds that each hour seemed to unfurl and multiply, when his attention was aroused by the quick clatter of the pony's hoofs on the well-kept drive. He turned, and recognising the boy as the village telegraph messenger, raised his hand as a signal for him to stop. John pulled up instantly, and began to fumble in his pocket for the envelope. Then dismounting, he stood respectfully waiting until the great man should draw near enough to enable him to present it to him.

"What a fine fellow! Lor', what a handsome man he is!" thought John. "I'd give something to hold m'self same as he does. Expect it's soldiering what did that for him."

John was better acquainted with the Countess than her husband; she had been kind to his mother when sick, and he had seen a great deal of her; but he owned to feeling very shy and bashful before "me Lord."

"Well, my boy! I see you've got a telegram for me."

"Yes, me Lord," touching his cap respectfully.

"But why gallop your poor pony so unmercifully—up hill, too?"

"Station-master told me to hurry up, me Lord."

John noticed that as he read his strong hand shook; the handsome face grew clouded, the firm lips tightened.

"I'd give a lot to know what's in that telegram,"

thought the boy. "Likely enough some of them poachers has been caught, and this is to tell him on it. He looks rare and upset about it, anyhow."

De Woodville read the message for the third time; then, pressing his hand to his brow, moved forward, forgetful of the presence of the little messenger, who stood waiting patiently beside him.

"Beg pardon, me Lord," said John, hurrying after him, "but be there any answer to go back?"

"No—yes—of course! Follow to the house and wait until it's ready. And stay—take this, my boy! You did well to hurry as you did."

"Thank you very much, me Lord," said John, once more touching his cap, ere he pocketed the coin. De Woodville walked quickly forward, and, on reaching the Court, turned in at a low wicket-gate and passed through a side entrance.

"Where is her Ladyship?" he demanded, hastily, of blooming little Norah, the maid, catching sight of her figure as she crossed the hall in front of him. She had grown more bonnie than ever in the service of her gentle mistress, and liked her position there far too well to dream of changing it, though many a love-sick swain in the servants' hall had tried his best to persuade her to link her fate with his.

"I have just left her, my Lord. She and the young ladies have taken flowers from the conservatory and are now in the little chapel. Shall I tell her that you wish to see her, sir?"

"No, thanks; I will go in search of her myself."

Up the broad staircase, across the picture gallery,

hurried the Earl, over the very ground his wife had trod that New Year's Eve when, as a guest, she had secretly left the ball-room and had stolen away to the solitude of the chapel.

Norah watched the figure of her master disappear. She had observed the piece of crushed paper in his hand, and connected its contents with his stern voice and look of agitation. "I wonder what's up now," she meditated. "I do hope it's no bad news of Lady O'Hagan, or her family. But he did look so upset! Perhaps I had better be somewhere near in case my Lady wants me."

De Woodville opened the folding doors, and passing between the heavy curtains, walked towards the group. There was our little friend Marie as busy as ever. The little matron was at the very work she had always most excelled in. Mounted on some small steps, she was decorating with lovely flowers Our Lady's Altar. There hung the very silver wreath she had won at dear St. Benedict's; whilst a small figure in white—the eldest daughter (aged six summers), the Lady Mary—stood on tiptoe, stretching out her arms in the endeavour to hand her mother a piece of costly lace to hang upon the wreath.

"Oh, here's father!" whispered a baby voice very loudly. "Do tum and help us." It was the other little daughter, Beatrice—a tiny dot of three—who spoke. She was seated upon the floor, surrounded by leaves and flowers, which she was stuffing promiscuously into a vase that stood between her small fat legs. Marie turned; and

hearing her husband's quick step, jumped from her perch on to the floor.

"What is it, dear?" she said, coaxingly, for she knew that he was always afraid of her climbing, lest she should slip and injure herself. "You see it is Our Lady's month, and I love to keep her altar nice!"

"Quite right, darling," he answered, slipping his arm through hers, without noticing the faint flush of confusion that tinged her cheek. "Leave the children for a moment; they will be all right; I have something to say to you."

She looked up at him quickly, for his serious tone surprised her, and a look of alarm came into her sweet upturned face. He led her to the private entrance, under the portals of that broad archway where once before they had stood together, when she had unwillingly listened to his almost hopeless tale of love, and, in her startled confusion, had endeavoured to tear the chaplet of pearls from her fair young neck. They had not altered much since then. It was but a few years ago, and time had dealt very leniently with both of them. Her figure was a trifle fuller and her step more dignified than of old; but her heart was light, for she was very happy. Yet was it as full of thoughtful kindness for others as ever. He was as devoted, as proud of her as it was possible to be. If a little stern and haughty in his manner towards others, Nature had formed him so; to her he was all kindness and condescension.

"What is it, Regie?" she asked, clinging to his arm; "you have had some sudden news?"

"Yes, dear one, I have. Wait, and I will read it to you ; but you must not be alarmed. You see we have no details ; we can but surmise."

"It is a telegram," she said hurriedly. "Who has sent it? Tell me, Regie!" He smoothed out the paper which he had crushed within his hand ; then answered slowly :

"It is from Percy—from Father Basil."

She did not speak ; but glancing over his arm, she hastily deciphered the following :

"Come at once to the Convent in the Rue de Cloys. Sister Marguerite badly injured. Is very ill."

"O, my God, they have shot her !" cried Marie, bursting into tears and sinking upon a velvet-cushioned seat close by. "My darling Bertie, shall I never see you again !" Her husband stood over her, and throwing his arms around her, pressed her closely to him.

"Don't cry so, little wife?" he urged tenderly. "Percy was always quick and thoughtless. It may not be so bad as we suppose. We will go to her, dear. When can you be ready?"

She looked very young and girlish as he held her to him. Her dress, of the palest blue, hung in graceful folds around her little form, whilst some rare old creamy lace fell in dainty ripples from her neck and arms. Who could say they did not make a lovely picture yet? Truly, they had changed places—the figures have moved in the tableau since that memorable night when he, the strong man, wept, and she would fain have comforted with distant, but maidenly reserve.

"Don't weep so, Marie," he said, more tenderly than before, as he heard the heavy sobs and felt the helpless weight of the little form press still nearer to him. "Try to bear up, my wife; and after a good night's rest be ready to accompany me to Sister Marguerite's side. Think how delighted she will be to see us; and let us try to nurse her back to health."

"Yes, yes! of course; how selfish I am, Regie, dear. But I love her so!" she sobbed again. "O, how base and cruel to shoot such a sweet and noble girl!"

"But, Marie, dear, you are jumping to conclusions. The message does not say that she was shot."

"They shot the Archbishop; why should they spare her? Oh, I have read the awful accounts of all their cruel ways. Poor little Bertie!"

At this moment there issued from the precincts of the chapel a noise as of something falling, followed by a sharp childish cry of fright.

"Oh, my babies!" cried the anxious mother. "What can have happened?"

Norah, who was hovering near, heard it also and rushed to the rescue. It was only busy little Mary's hands that, in her efforts to "help mother," had knocked from off its perch a flower-pot, scattering plant and soil over the head of little Beatrice, who stood beneath. The little maidens were soon pacified and led away by nurse, who had been summoned by the Earl.

Marie had three children. Little Lord Grantheuse was the eldest and the only son. He was a fine,

nealthy boy, and strongly resembled his grandfather in both looks and ways. Lady Mary was fair, tall, and delicate. It was difficult to say whom she resembled most; but it was thought that her quaint little face was very like the picture of an ancestor which hung upon the wall. Little Lady Beatrice had a look of her aunt, Sister Marguerite, about her tiny mouth; but she had stolen her mother's hair and eyes, and had all her father's determined ways. They were sweet little children, without being remarkably pretty or striking.

After they had departed, De Woodville beckoned Norah aside and talked to her gravely. Many times during the colloquy the maid nodded her head. When he had ceased she turned with confidence and sympathy to her mistress, and led her to her own apartments. She would endeavour to induce her to rest, while she made the necessary preparations for their journey to-morrow.

The Earl retired to his library and, ringing the bell, inquired of the footman whether Ryder was in the hall.

"Yes, my Lord."

"Then tell him I wish to see him."

Now the old coachman had seen and spoken with the boy John waiting in the yard, and had learnt from him of the important telegram and the mysterious effect it had had upon his Lordship. So he was a little anxious and curious; for everything that touched "the family" affected him. He therefore rose with alacrity, and no small feeling of importance, when the summons came. It was not the first time the family had consulted him in

matters of grave importance. He opened the study door and, hat in hand, made his respects; then stood awaiting further orders.

"Oh, Ryder," said his Lordship, looking up, "I shall require the dog-cart, if fine—if not, the carriage—early to-morrow morning. Her ladyship and I are called to Paris, and we must catch the 7.30 to town."

"To Paris!" The words fell like a sudden weight of lead upon the old man's heart. "Isn't that where our young lady is?" he thought. "God grant that nothing has happened to her!" He still looked upon and spoke of Sister Marguerite as "our young lady."

"Yes, to Paris, Ryder. I trust we shall have a good journey. Your mistress is not very well just now." As a matter of fact, travelling rarely ever upset the Countess; she was a very healthy little woman.

"I hope so, me Lord?" he faltered, still standing and turning his hat nervously round in his hands. "But may I make bold," he ventured, "to ask if our young lady, Lady Beatrice as was, is all right?"

"No, John: I grieve to tell you she is not. God help her, she is very ill—has had an accident of some sort, I fear. Father Basil has telegraphed for us to go at once."

"O Lord! O Lord!" cried the old man, throwing up his arms in terror. "Has it come to this at last? We might 'a knowed it, me Lord. *She* was never fit to be among a lot of rough, quarrelsome curs, like them Frenchmen. A kind, gentle-hearted

lady like her ! Oh, me Lord, may I go and see her also ! ”

“ You, Ryder ? ” said the Earl, very kindly, for he was sorry to see the old man shake and tremble so ; “ you are getting old, John ; the journey might be too much for you ; and I only intended to take Norah with us. You see, we must make all speed to reach her. ”

“ Oh, I don’t wish to detain you, sir. But may I go on my own account. I’ll trouble nobody. I’m not so old and feeble as to be afraid of a Frenchman yet. ”

“ You may do as you like, Ryder. But take care of yourself. Travel comfortably ; you have not done much of it of late : besides, you will find it anything but agreeable in Paris just now. ”

“ What’s good enough for her is good enough for me, my Lord, ” said the old man with some dignity.

“ At least take some one with you who will help to look after you. ”

“ Yes, sir. I’ll take a friend as’ll do all that, and more, if only we may go and see her. ”

“ Very well, then. There is her address. Take this to the little telegraph-boy : he has had rather a long wait. ”

“ Your Lordship won’t tell her we’re coming. I’d rather go to her unbeknown as it were. ”

“ All right, John ! ” But when he left the room the master smiled kindly, but sadly. “ Poor old John, how fond and attached he has always been to my little sister ! Will he be in time to see her, I wonder ? Will any of us, indeed ? ”

Ryder tried his best. For long before his master or mistress were stirring, even by daybreak the next morning, the old coachman, who had never lain down to rest, or even closed his eyes in sleep, since he left his master's presence, donned his new shining suit of livery, fed, brushed, and smartened up his old friend Leo, and by early dawn with his canine companion was trudging on the road to Oakhome.

Marie and her husband were not aware that in the selfsame boat which conveyed them to France, hidden away amongst the passengers, were these two faithful creatures, bound for the same port as themselves.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It was Micky O'Brien, the widow's eldest son, a fine, sturdy boy of eleven, who delivered the telegraphic message at Bracken Park, the home of the O'Hagans.

Micky was now the head of his family; and since the good lady up at the Hall ("God bless her!") had clothed and shod his little form, and put him in a "dacent" way of earning an honest living, why, not only his fond mother, but the whole tribe of her helpless little ones, looked up to him with a kind of awe, mingled with grave respect; for "sure now, wasn't our Micky every inch a gentleman!"

Leaving his companions, two merry-faced, unshod urchins, outside the great lodge gates, Micky drew himself up with an air of importance, and dived boldly into what seemed to him fairyland itself.

Up and down rose and fell the rich green sward in sunny hill and sheltered fairy dell.

All here was *Nature* as she loved to thrive and grow. The fresh young grass was studded with sweet spring flowers of every shade and hue; snowdrops and lilies of the valley, grown strong and luxuriant by years of unmolested peace, stood out in bold and peerless groups. The sweet prim-

rose and polyanthus, the violet and daffodil, all blossomed side by side ; so numerous were the hyacinths and bluebells you knew not where to tread. The homely rooks in the elms above were busy with their young, and the birds piped and sang as sweetly as on that sunny day when Marie Blake and Beatrice de Woodville, seated on the fallen tree, had whispered their heart's secrets to each other.

Micky took a short cut across the park. He looked neither to the right nor to the left, but made straight for the great door. His mind seemed filled with but one idea. He was on Her Majesty's service; all else must give place to that. So the hall bell pealed loudly to announce his presence. The door was opened in swift answer to his call ; but when the old man-servant discovered who the visitor was, he was irate, and said in an indignant tone :

" Be gad, me foin man, but I'm thinking that the back door would be fitter for the loikes o' you."

" Is the master within?" inquired Micky, never heeding the rebuke.

" He is !"

" Then take him this"—handing the wire—" at once, mind ye. For wasn't I towld, 'Hurry, Micky, me boy, for 'tis of grave importance.'"

" And faith, is it becoming, think ye, for the loikes o' you to be repateing what's within a tili-grame? And go round to the back wid ye, and wait till his Lordship thinks fit to send you an answer." The old man then closed the door abruptly, and went in search of his master, whom he at last discovered poring over a case filled with

rare beetles and butterflies, in a room set apart as a museum.

Our old friend Louis, Lord O'Hagan, spent a great deal of time and money in this class of study, and had collected a most valuable assortment of animals, insects, rare china, and jewellery.

"A tiligrame, me Lord," said the servant, advancing with it on a salver.

"Put it down, Thomas," was the careless reply. "I'll see to it presently."

"Begging your Lordship's pardon," said the man respectfully, "the bowld spalpeen that carried it had the livin' impidence to hint that this same tiligrame was of mighty importance: and would there be an answer?"

"I'll soon tell you." And O'Hagan took it up rather impatiently: it was somewhat annoying to be disturbed just then. But noticing how the envelope was addressed to his wife, he opened it more seriously and read as follows: "Come at once to the Rue de Cloyſ. Sister Marguerite injured. Is very ill. Wishes to see you.—BASIL DE WOODVILLE."

"Thomas, where is your mistress?" cried his Lordship, pitching his beautiful specimens to one side.

"She's been out since lunch, your honour. I've a brave notion she's down beyant at Biddy McGuire's, for isn't the ould critter in sore distress an' dying?"

"Send for her at once. She must come home. I want her!"

"Now, be Javy! an' I make speed enough, I'll

be able to catch the young gentlemen, who are just after mounting their ponies out in the yard there. They're the boys that'll fetch her." And away hurried Thomas.

"Tell Lady O'Hagan I want her as quickly as she can come!" shouted his Lordship, who had read over the telegram again.

Tom was lucky enough to catch the two young rogues ere they left the stable yard. Each was mounted upon a pretty, well-bred pony, and they were engaged in a brisk argument with the groom as to which road they should take, when the sudden appearance of the old servant put an end to their discussion. Nothing loth, off they set on their errand—to fetch mother—and the sound of the iron-shod galloping hoofs rang out pleasantly in the distance.

They were sturdy, bonnie boys, these scions of a noble race; whilst the daughter of the house, little Margaret, the third, was a sweet, beautiful child—but more of her anon. Loo, the eldest son, was full of fun and laughter, curly-haired and fearless. Basil was more thoughtful, stolid and determined; whilst baby Willie was fair, like his mother, with clear grey eyes and chestnut hair. He was more fragile and delicate.

After the boys had gone, O'Hagan wandered restlessly about. He paced the house with an anxious step; then strode out into the park with the telegram in his hand. Poor dear Sister Marguerite! What a good friend she had always been to them. What should they do? Madge was wise; she must decide it all. He would go and meet her down the

drive. Hark ! there was a clattering of hoofs—now it was hushed—they had passed the lodge, and were now on the soft green turf rising the hill in front. Yes, there was the bounding chestnut ; and seated upon its back—so firm and graceful her seat and attitude—was Madge ; whilst not very far behind, plying whip and heel, came Loo on his gallant steed. Then stolid, steady Basil ; and last of all the groom. Madge spied her husband and cantered to his side ; then, observing his unusually serious look, sprang lightly to the ground, saying cheerfully :

“ Why this scowl, Louie dear ? We have but had a race ! ” Her face was flushed, her clear skin shone, her eyes were sweet and true ; and Louis stooped and kissed with pride and joy the wife he loved so fondly. Not all the three kingdoms could produce a finer woman than our old friend Madge.

“ What is it, Loo ? ” she asked playfully. “ ’Tis so unlike you to look so grave. Ah ! ”—and her countenance changed—“ you have had a telegram ! ”

“ Yes, darling ! Here, John ! ”—this to the groom—“ take this horse and lead the boys and ponies home.”

But here the chestnut, which until then had followed its mistress, now turned towards her and neighed. “ Dear Marmaduke ! I had almost forgotten you,” she said. Then she took a lump of sugar from her pocket and handed it to him ; he took it gently and submitted to being led away.

Madge gathered up her habit of dark myrtle green ; then, waving to the boys, resumed her place at her husband’s side. She took the pink paper

from his unresisting hand, and paused to read it.

As she did so the colour fled from her cheek ; her lips turned white ; she trembled and staggered : and a cold perspiration broke over her, but she did not speak.

“ Nay, wife, dearest,” said O’Hagan anxiously, as he supported her. “ Don’t take it so to heart ! She may not be so bad ; and if she is, dear soul, she’ll surely go to heaven ! ”

“ Yes, Louie,” answered his wife, bravely endeavouring to stifle her sorrow and to regain her composure, “ but she is in pain ; she is suffering . And there is no woman on earth whom I love as much as I do her, nor one whom I admire half as much. I tell you, she has met her accident in self-sacrifice. Oh, yes, she has ! Don’t shake your head ; I know her well.”

“ Then what are we to do, wife ? ”

“ We must catch the midnight boat.”

“ But Madge, dear ! ” he interrupted quickly, “ you are such a dreadful traveller. And at night you will be even more sick and ill than ever ! ”

“ Do you not read,” she said firmly, “ that she wants me ? Could I rest and know that she was perhaps dying, and longing to see me once again ? No, no, Louie ; I will chance the sickness. I shall not be so ill as she. Ah, I seem to feel that she has sacrificed herself ; she has fallen at her post. I *will*—I *must* go to her ! Come along, dear ; there is no time to waste.”

Madge had not been reared in soft luxury and ease ; she had suffered, and knew how to endure. Hers was a nature that, had stern duty called,

could—though her heart were breaking—have buckled on shield and sword to her nearest and dearest, and have bidden them go, in God's name, and defend the weak and helpless, or their country's fame. Louis had always felt the power of her spirit, and yielded to her in many things.

As they neared the fine old Hall they espied a woman's figure, erect and tall. Whose is it? Surely we recognise her form, so high and yet so flat and shapeless, crowned by the big black bonnet and spotless frill. 'Tis pleasant to meet old faces in unforgotten places; and dear old Yorkshire Mary's is as welcome as ever. It brings a whiff of the past, and bears the aspect of truth and worth in its dear hard lines which it does one good to remember. Yes, there was old Mary, not looking one iota changed, or one day older, striding across the lawn to meet them. A tall, slight girl, of perhaps ten years, clung tightly to her hand, and persistently drew her on.

"Come along, Mary! See how quickly you can run! You need exercise, you know," cried the fresh young voice. "Mother, dear, did I not do right? She has been shut up in the house with baby brother all this lovely day, and I have dragged her out!"

"Bring her here, Margaret, love; I want you both." Mary would not have stirred a foot for any one on earth, save for those two, had she not wished, but refuse dainty little Margaret she could not; she almost worshipped the child, with her stately manner and queenly little airs, and yielded to her as she had never done to mortal before. So

she was dragged on to where the parents stood, and Mary had to put her apron to her mouth to subdue the gasps she made in the effort to regain her breath.

Madge could not suppress a faint smile as she took her little daughter's hand; but it quickly faded from her lips, and Mary looked anxiously at her pallid cheek. "I have had a message from Father de Woodville," began the lady, but her voice grew tremulous as she continued. "He tells me that our dear Sister Marguerite is very, very ill. She is in Paris, and wishes much to see me."

"Oh, mother!" broke in the little girl, clinging to her hand, "surely she will not die?"

"I hope not indeed, my love; but we must pray very hard for her. Your father and I leave in an hour or so. We are going to her at once."

"Mother, mother, let me go too! I must see her once again before she dies. We have a secret together, and we promised to talk of it when next we met. It is *so* important! And if you only knew how I long to see her, you would not refuse my request."

"Margaret, my darling, you cannot come to-night," answered her mother firmly. "But I will tell you what shall be done. Should she get better—should she recover sufficiently to see you—you shall go to Paris and join us. Mary, you will take her in your charge, as you did her mother years ago when she was a little child."

"Don't you know I will, me Lady, with all me heart. But, oh lor', oh lor', to think of that sweet critter a-lying ill and maybe dying, and none of

her kith and kin near by. Ah, believe me," continued Mary, shaking her head sadly, "I nivver did approve of the life she chuse. I knowed she'd come to a bad end! I knowed she would."

"Well, take great care of baby and the children during my absence, Mary, should Billy be able to spare you for so long."

"Oh, Billy's right enough. He's very easy-natured, and who knows but he may be glad to get shut o' me sometimes. Come along, Miss Margaret. Trust Mary, me Lady, to see to you and yourn. Come, my pet!"

Little Margaret had not spoken a word since her mother had refused to take her with them; but her pretty eyes were dimmed with unshed tears, and stilled was the merry laugh as she silently obeyed Mary and walked home by her side.

"Don't take on so, dearie," said the woman, drawing the girl's arm tenderly through her own. "She won't die, and you and me'll go and see her. Now, mark my words, we will." The child gave a little sob. "I do want to see her, Mary—really I do."

"Whist, whist! my lamb; and so you shall. Only don't lose heart. Mother always knows what's best."

"Yes, Mary; but if she dies it will be so very hard!"

Little Margaret was a lovely child—clever and thoughtful, too, beyond her years. Her features were refined and sweet, and her colouring was rich. She possessed large, dark grey eyes, a clear, healthy skin, and a vigorous mind. She ruled her younger brothers with an absolute but sympathetic sway.

Undoubtedly, there was that about her which marked her as one born to command.

Mary Northgreaves was on a visit to her old mistress. Long ago she and little Margaret had formed a compact between them that whenever dear mother or any of the little ones were ill, a letter should be posted immediately to Mary; and these important missives—already stamped and written in the old servant's awkward hand—were kept hidden away under the paper lining of the child's only private drawer. They were not aware that mother came across them one day, and had smiled kindly to herself as she replaced them carefully in their simple hiding-place.

Mother had not been well of late, and baby Willie had been taken suddenly ill; and thus Mary was summoned by Margaret, whilst mother smiled in her sleeve at their silent but devoted kindness.

Lady O'Hagan leaned rather heavily upon her husband's arm as he led her back to the house; this sad news of her old friend was a great blow to her. In vain Louis beseeched her to rest for a night; at least, ere she started on the journey. With her old indomitable spirit she only shook her head, and replied:

"No, no, my Louie, Do you not read through the lines that she wants me? Shame on me if I could not make this small sacrifice for her; and *she* has sacrificed almost her life for others. Come with me; let us not waste a moment. Marie, too, will be summoned, I feel sure. Mary will look after our little ones. Let us hasten, then.

CHAPTER XXVII.

PARIS was enjoying a time of comparative peace, which she employed in burying her dead.

Almost every house, café, and place of public resort exhibited some token of respect for the dead as they were solemnly borne to their last resting-places. Men breathed more freely, and women prayed that all such weary strife might be ended for ever.

"How is she, Ma Sœur?" inquired Father de Woodville anxiously, on the morning of the following day, as he entered the convent door.

"Thank God, she seems decidedly better. The doctors have made an examination, and report that two of her ribs have been crushed in; but of that they have every hope of a perfect cure. What really causes poor Dr. Arno grave anxiety is the recurrence of that troublesome cough and the very weak state of her lungs. They all agree upon one point: that she has been allowed to overtax her strength to such a degree that only the greatest care and good nursing can ever set her upon her feet again."

"I know, I know," answered her brother, shaking his head sadly. "She has thought of everyone but herself. However, my brother, his wife, and Lady

O'Hagan will be in Paris in the course of the day, I fancy ; and they will do their utmost to ensure that she wants for nothing. And you, dear Ma Sœur, will lavish every care upon her, for I know she is very dear to you !”

“Almost dearer than she should be, Father. I loved her from the first day I saw her ; and perhaps it may be some small comfort to you to know that another dear old friend of hers and yours is in the convent at the present moment, and it will be her delight to help nurse our dear little patient. I speak of Sister Frances de Sales ; she was a De Mowbrey, and was devoted to your sister when they were girls together. The Abbé Marlière has been several times to see Sister Marguerite. He told me she was very cheerful, though quite conscious of her critical condition. The only regret that seemed to trouble her was that she had done so little for our Lord. She is very weak, and so terribly feverish and excitable that I think it more than probable the doctors will absolutely refuse permission for any friends to see her, for a few days at least.”

“Surely I may see her ?”

“Oh, yes ; no one can well refuse you that privilege ; she is continually asking for you, and Dr. Arno told me it would evidently ease her mind to see and speak to you. Only do not permit her to overtire herself. Go in, Father ; she is expecting you ; I have but just left her, with the firm promise to send you in the moment you arrived.”

He opened the parlour door, and stealing softly across the dimly-lighted apartment, sank cautiously

into the low chair at the bedside. But the nervous little brain caught the sound of his stealthy step; and, opening her eyes, she saw him. A look of joy welcomed him—such a look as she alone could give. He needed no words from her to read her heart.

“Well, little sister mine,” he said, taking up tenderly one of the wounded hands. “How I thank God that you are a trifle better to-day!”

She could not utter a word. But her mouth quivered, and tears of joy sprang into her eyes and rolled slowly down each flushed and burning cheek.

“Nay, nay, dear; you must not do this, or I shall be forbidden to visit you again.”

“I could not help it, Percy”—she liked the old name best—“I am not quite myself yet. I am weak. It is so long since we met, and, oh, I am so glad to see you. I have so many things to ask you about. I must know them, for they trouble my brain so dreadfully as I lie here. Do tell me if Mr. Manfred has confessed to you or anyone the history of his life.

“Now listen to me, dearest of all little wilful sisters, and I will make a compact with you. Our time together will be very short. Let us make the most of it. Do you be very quiet and good—neither interrupting me, nor getting too excited—and I will tell you everything that I judge to be good for you to hear, and that will interest you most.”

“As you will, wisest and best of all old Fathers,” she answered, with a ring of her old humour. “I

will try to subdue my curiosity and obey ; but do not be very much shocked or surprised should I interrupt you now and again with an odd question or two."

"I am about to begin by asking you one." He smiled. "Tell me just how you feel. Are you in pain? Do you suffer very much?"

"When I cough or take a long breath the pain is very severe. My head also aches terribly at times, and these poor elegant hands smart not a little."

"You are very patient, poor little sufferer! I am so sorry for you."

"Now tell me about my patients, Percy. Were you not surprised at Manfred's tale?"

"I never was more astonished in my life; in fact, I have not yet recovered from the effects of his history, and all it involved. But, to crowd as much news as I can into a small space of time, I was able to secure the assistance of a kind and clever attorney, and in the presence of both of us Manfred made a full disclosure of the conspiracy. His signed confession is already on its way to the Home Secretary——"

"Oh, how good is God. I thank Him with all my heart."

"Remember your promise not to interrupt."

"I must know if Manfred is still sorry for all this—if his sentiments are still good?"

"Rarely have I witnessed more genuine sorrow and regret for a mis-spent life than he evinced, even up to his last moments : for he died last evening."

"Died, Percy! Poor man, is it possible that he

is already dead? And he feared death so terribly! Surely someone was there to aid him in his last moments?"

"Yes, he died in my arms. We were alone together for a long time; I never left him until all was over, and I had rendered him every aid possible under the circumstances. All fear of death fled from him; he was glad to go. His last words were a message of thanks to you, of whom he could not speak without weeping. He said that, under God, he owed everything to you; and that we were to tell his brother that it was you alone who obtained his release, and much, much more, which I may tell you some time when you can better bear to hear it." He observed that her lips were trembling, and judged it better to speak upon a more cheerful topic. "Can you realise," he continued, "that, all being well, poor Sir Edmund Leadbitter will soon be restored to honour and his own again!"

"The very thought of it all sets my pulses thrilling with joy and gratitude. I could almost find strength to leap from my couch when I think of the meeting between him and his faithful wife. I have shared their sorrow so deeply, have worked and prayed so hard for the truth to be brought to light, that I can indeed rejoice for and with them now. You see, I knew the little wife; she had told me all this two years ago."

"Where does she live?" He asked this to see if she would confirm the strange story told by Manfred as to her whereabouts, which he had even now some difficulty in crediting.

“Why, right under your very eyes! At the Western Lodge of dear old Baron Court.”

“If you say so, it must be true. But Mrs. MacDermot—as we called her—was so quiet, so unassuming, that, though we felt that she was above her station, we never supposed her to be poor Lady Leadbitter. How astonished both Marie and Madge will be when they discover this!”

“She told me her sad story in the strictest confidence, not knowing at the time that I had any connection with the De Woodvilles or Baron Court. So I felt bound to keep her secret. She declared she could not face the world; yet she must earn money against the time of her husband's release, so that he should have a little rest and comfort; and having given her mind to washing and getting up dainty articles of clothing, she soon excelled in her work. Marie and Madge assisted her in every possible way; and Marie told me often that when returning home late at night she had seen a light in the cottage window, and her heart had ached for the silent woman, toiling to earn money, which all knew she never spent upon herself. Dear Percy, does she know of the confession of Manfred? Have you not telegraphed to her?”

“Hush! hush! You are exciting yourself too much. Do leave all this to our judgment, or you will delay your own recovery, and never be able to witness the joy you have so gallantly brought about.”

“’Tis hard not to speak of a subject when one's heart is so filled with it,” she sighed playfully. “I

should have sent her ten telegrams by this ! Poor little wife ! ”

“ No doubt you would ! In your kind, impulsive manner you would have flung money away right and left, and have set Mrs. MacDermot’s heart in such a flutter that she would have been fit for nothing. You see, we want to be more sure of our case before raising hopes in her heart. The uncle’s will and some other valuable papers have still to be found before our case is completed. Manfred did tell us where they were ; but the story seemed very strange, and he might have been a little delirious, you know, for he suffered great agony from his foot at times.”

“ No matter how strange or improbable his story may have appeared, you must go and look for those papers just where he told you they were. Poor man ! I really believe that had he been well brought up, he would have made a fine character. Perhaps, had we been in his place, we might have turned out no better than he. By the way, have you heard what has become of old Mère Corbette ? They assured me that she was saved. How long ago it all seems ! Yet you tell me it is scarcely forty-eight hours since all that terrible fighting took place, and the fire. How terribly vivid it all seems ! ” And she closed her eyes as though to shut out the frightful memory.

“ Do not think of it, then, and do not trouble about the old woman ; for I can assure you, on good authority that, as far as we can judge, she is better off now than she has been for a long time.” He would not excite her sympathetic mind by

telling her that she also was dead: she had suffered enough for her patients as it was. He would speak of brighter subjects. "Would you like very much to see Marie and Madge again?" he asked quietly—then instantly regretted the question; for he saw her start, and the hectic flush on her cheek deepen to a vivid crimson, whilst the ready tears sprang to her eyes as she answered almost reproachfully:

"Can you ask it? Do you imagine that as I lie here I do not think of them, and wonder what they, Regie and Louis, will say when they hear that their strong, healthy little sister is laid low at last. Have you told them that I am not well?"

"Yes," he smiled. "I have informed them that you are very ill, dear, and you may expect to hear of or from them ere many hours have elapsed."

"Percy! You do not mean that they may come to Paris—in its present state?" she cried in alarm. "Oh, tell them, warn them of the danger in this terrible city. They must not risk their precious lives for *me*! No, much as I should like to see them, they must not be allowed to come!"

"Very well, then," he answered soothingly; "don't trouble any more about them. Paris is quieting down very rapidly. If only you could be made to get well as speedily, then perhaps, when things are calmer and you are stronger, they *might* be tempted to come and see you." She had entirely forgotten how, when half fainting and unconscious the day before, she had urged and pleaded to see them.

"Dear, dear girls," she said, as if to herself, and

a far-off look stole into her eyes; "I wonder if Marie's little face is as sweet as ever, and the look of firm, enduring friendship as clear as ever in Madge's steadfast gaze. And their little ones—Marie's boy!—and my dear little Margaret the Third, as I call her—the sweet child! Heaven has indeed endowed her with rare gifts; she has a destiny before her!"

"Father de Woodville, I am sorry to interrupt you; but you have already outstayed your allotted time, and the doctor's orders were very stringent that Sister Marguerite should not be allowed to talk too much," said Ma Sœur kindly. "Should she be no worse for this *tête-à-tête*, you will be able to see each other to-morrow again, and resume your conversation."

"Must he really go, Ma Sœur? I am so much better for his visit," pleaded Sister Marguerite.

"Yes; good-bye, and God bless you, dear one," he said, placing his hand fondly on her head, and signing her aching brow with the sign of the Cross. "Take care of yourself, and I may then be permitted to return to-morrow."

"Good-bye, Father and brother in one," she said; "come early to-morrow, and in the meantime pray for me."

He nodded and smiled; then followed Ma Sœur out of the room. "There are two telegrams awaiting you upon the parlour table," announced Ma Sœur in a low voice; "perhaps they may require an answer. Come and see them." He read them both.

"This one," he said, looking up, "is from my

brother ; he and his wife will arrive in Paris about five o'clock this evening. And this is from Lady O'Hagan and her husband. They hope to be here by eight o'clock."

"Well, they cannot see Sister Marguerite this evening, I fear. You know how weak and feverish she is."

"Oh, yes ; she must not even know that they are here. She is fearfully nervous and excitable at present," he answered gravely. "I will meet them on their arrival, and conduct them all to the same hotel. It will comfort them to know that she is better, and not in any immediate danger."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

It was a very pleasant and cheerful party—in spite of their grave disappointment at not being able to see dear Sister Marguerite—which met that evening around the comfortable fire in one of the private rooms of the hotel.

Marie, Countess de Woodville, was looking very young and pretty as, clad in her travelling dress of light fawn cloth, she sat shading her rosy face from the heat of the fire by the aid of an elaborate fan, while she questioned with intense interest her brother-in-law, Father de Woodville, and learned from him of the gallant conduct of the poor little invalid. Her husband was seated beside her, resting one arm on the back of her low easy-chair : his eyes also were fixed intently upon his brother ; whilst Madge sat upright upon the couch at the opposite side of the fireplace, only resting her weary head upon her hand. She was feeling very tired and unwell ; the journey had been too much for her. Yet she would not give in ; but was watching and listening with all her heart and soul ; and though she had, so far, spoken but little, her pulse was throbbing with excitement. Her husband had drawn his chair close beside her, and held one of her hands in his. He knew that she

was suffering, and frequently cast a look of anxiety towards her, for he knew also her powers of endurance, and that she would never complain. Sometimes Father de Woodville sat in the centre of the group; sometimes he rose to emphasise what he was saying, and stood with his back to the fire, in front of them.

"You say she is very much burnt and injured, Father?" said the little Countess, almost impatiently. "But how did it all happen? Where was she? Did some hospital catch fire? Do tell us all about it."

"I will. But you must allow me breathing time, and bear in mind that I have already told you to be prepared for a surprise."

He briefly related to them the circumstances which gave to Sister Marguerite the care of Harold Manfred.

"Harold Manfred!" repeated the Earl, frowning ominously. "Why, that was the man who came with our cousin Lonsdale on a visit to the Court last autumn, and then left so suddenly. They traced him to Paris and then lost sight of him. I have since believed him to be the same sneak and scoundrel who was half-brother to poor old Lead-bitter. You remember him, surely?"

"You are right. He was one and the same man, and our little sister tended and nursed him with the greatest care."

"I never could endure the man!" muttered De Woodville, striking the back of his wife's chair.

"Hush, dear!" she said quietly. "Do continue, Father."

“Well, by some means—through his delirious ravings, I fancy—Sister Marguerite discovered a very great deal of this man’s history—much of which was not at all to his credit.”

De Woodville gave a grunt of disgust.

“Then it appears she has known poor Leadbitter’s wife rather intimately for the last few years.”

“Is it possible?” interrupted Marie, whilst Madge merely raised her eyebrows significantly, and pressed her hand tighter to her aching brow.

“Yes, it is a fact; and what will appear to you more mysterious still, is that Lady Leadbitter, in the strictest confidence, confided her sorrows to this little Sister of Charity two years ago. Now you will see how, as she listened to the ravings of her sick patient, she guessed the man’s identity, and much of his true character and history. As for him, the constant contact with her, together doubtless with his sufferings and the weakened state of his body, had such an effect upon Manfred that to relieve his mind—if for no better purpose—he insisted upon telling her the history of his miserable life; not, however, as of himself, but as of a third person. But she knew well enough that it was his own history he was relating, and contrived to fill his mind with such shame, that he could not rest for the desire he had to confess his guilt to her. All this I have learnt from the lips of Manfred himself, and from Ma Soeur, during the last twenty-four hours.”

De Woodville had risen from his chair, and was now slowly pacing the floor. “What had Manfred

told his sister? Was there a chance for poor Leadbitter?" He dared not ask the question yet, for fear of a disappointment.

"Go on, Percival," he said abruptly. "What did the man tell Sister Marguerite?"

"An almost incredible story; that this imaginary third person, aided by another rogue, had caused an honest man to be condemned to penal servitude for a crime of which he was perfectly innocent."

"Great Heavens!" cried the Earl, almost staggering against a heavy cabinet for support—"he said that, did he, the villain? What next? What did or said our little Sister?"

"Recollect," continued Father de Woodville, "that so far Manfred had not confessed himself to be the guilty one. Suddenly on that awful night—but forty-eight hours ago—the little cottage which sheltered the patients was set on fire by the retreating Communists. The Sisters of Charity were dispersed very early to their duties that morning, and on her arrival at the cottage Sister Marguerite found it and several of the large buildings around enveloped in flames. Friendly hands had rescued the old woman; but Manfred, a foreigner and helpless, had been forgotten, and was left to perish. Strong hands sought to deter her from her purpose, but it was useless. She knew that upon that weak man's life hung the fate of brave and noble hearts. She had prayed, she had worked so hard to right the wrong, to save them from further sufferings; should all be lost for want of one last effort? Could she leave her patient to perish thus?—and he so unfit to meet his God!

No ! So she rushed boldly through the flames to his rescue."

During the last few moments the silence of the listeners had become so strained as to be almost painful. Madge pressed her husband's hand and whispered : " Was I not right, my Louie, when I told you she had sacrificed herself ? Ah, I knew it ! "

" Was she in time ? Did she save the man ? " asked De Woodville, in an excited voice.

" He was lodged in an inner chamber, and had managed to creep out of bed, poor creature, and had dragged his body across the floor, only to find the door locked against him. It was thus she discovered him, half-dazed with fear, and well-nigh suffocated with smoke. Quick as thought she rolled him in a sodden blanket, and dragged him from his death. But as she did so he grew strong ; he made her pause ; he confessed to her his name, his guilt, and bade her flee and save herself."

There was a stifled sob from Marie's quarter ; but her husband, his hands clasping tightly the back of a chair, said sternly : " Go on ! Did she flee, and did he perish ? "

" She made him promise that, should God give her strength to save him, he would confess to the world—as he had done to her—his own guilt and the innocence of his brother. Then," continued her younger brother, and his voice trembled—" she acted as a brave heart alone could do. She stuck to her burden, and dragged him as far as the open door, through which the flames were already shooting fiercely, and kneeling, she watched her chance. At last, detecting the sound of a friendly voice

outside, with her last remaining strength she urged her helpless burden forward to safety. At the same moment the ceiling of the inner room fell in, and she sank down exhausted and half suffocated."

"Brave, true heart—she is a De Woodville!" cried the Earl. "She fell at her post. What more could she do?"

"Father, Father!" said Marie, her eyes suffused with tears. "How was she saved, our dear one? Who rescued her?"

"The owner of the friendly voice, I'll warrant it!" exclaimed O'Hagan.

"The voice belonged to a kind and generous-hearted man, one Dr. Arno. At the peril of his life he went forward and drew her forth; but as he did so, some stones from above fell, and must have crushed her side. To this good man we all owe a debt of lifelong gratitude: not only did he save her from certain death, but he has devoted all his time and energies to aid her since."

"Thank God!" said Marie fervently.

"But Manfred," inquired the Earl impatiently. "Where is he?"

"Dead. Nay, do not look so horrified. All is well. I was with him for hours yesterday, and to me and a very competent lawyer he confessed all—the forgery, the suppression of the genuine will—everything. The lawyer is now on his way to England, to interview the Home Secretary in his behalf."

"And poor Leadbitter, does he know of this? Has any message been sent to the Governor of the prison?"

"I despatched one yesterday in our name of De Woodville—he would suppose it to be from you—explaining the position, and praying him to treat the prisoner with all possible leniency."

"You have done well, brother!" said the elder man, coming forward and shaking him warmly by the hand. "But it has come so suddenly upon me that I can scarcely realise it to be true. Yet from the first I swore that that fine young fellow was innocent; and now to think that we shall be able to prove it!"

"And all this is owing—under God—to our dear Sister Marguerite!" remarked Madge proudly. "Kind little heart! How she will rejoice." She had almost forgotten her own weariness and pain in the pride and joy she felt at hearing of the brave conduct of her friend.

"But Father," asked Marie in a puzzled voice, as she clasped her hands together, "where did Sister Marguerite meet Lady Leadbitter?"

For answer the good man broke into merry laughter. "Oh, you dense little stupid!" he said. "Now this is the amusing part of it all. Why, you have seen her—nay, spoken to her—almost every week."

"I?" cried Marie, drawing herself up to an erect sitting posture. "Surely you are joking! I have never seen her."

"I tell you that, unknowingly, you have all seen and conversed with her. Why, it took Manfred but a few hours to discover her identity and whereabouts. That discovery alone was the cause of his very abrupt and sudden departure from your own roof."

Marie shook her head, completely mystified, and the men looked on much amused. Suddenly the handsome cloak, with its soft lining of ermine, that O'Hagan had so carefully spread upon his wife's shoulders, fell from its resting-place, displaying her graceful figure, as bending forward she covered her face with her hands, and exclaimed, half playfully, half shamefacedly :

"Hush, Father, hush ! I have it ! But to think that we should not have suspected it long ago. She was so reticent, though, that I for one never sought to discover her secret."

"Now, Madge, what do you mean?" pleaded Marie.

"Yes, tell us," said both husbands together.

"Shall I, Father?"

"Certainly," he laughed. "If you can. You were always quick in your surmises ; doubtless you are right this time."

"Well, I mean," she stammered, "*my protégée*—Mrs. MacDermot, of your Western Lodge !"

"No ! surely not !" cried Marie, with a little cry of horror, as she rose to her feet and hid her face on her husband's arm. "Oh, Regie, think of it. I have paid her washing bills every week just as though she was an ordinary laundress. How dull and horrid she must think me !"

"Never mind, little one," said De Woodville coaxingly ; though he was amused at his wife's embarrassment. "You have always been very kind to her, and she did not wish to be recognised. By the way, where is she now?"

"She left her cottage a day or two ago," replied

Marie. "Ryder told me so. No one knows where she has gone to. He told me also that each year, about this same time, she leaves her home for a few days, returning more tired and careworn than ever."

"Mark my words, she goes to try and catch a glimpse of her husband. Should she not soon return to the Lodge, we may be sure she is near him, and has heard the good news."

"I hope you are right, Madge—indeed I do!" remarked Father de Woodville. "You see, the lawyer and I never thought of that. We decided not to communicate with her until we were *sure* of her husband's release. These things always require both time and red tape." And so they talked on, asking endless questions and picturing all manner of joys for the Leadbitters, the Earl growing quite excited, and vowing that he would take the case up himself. He would go to the prison, and would not leave it without his old friend. Father de Woodville urged them not to speak of the rescue of Manfred to Sister Marguerite, as the fire had been a severe trial to her nerves, and they wished her to forget it.

"I shall scold her well for not telling me the truth about Mrs. MacDermot. Never in all her life did she keep such a secret from *me*," said the little Countess, tossing her head.

"Ah!" answered Madge, laughing, "but this secret was confided to the care of *Sister Marguerite*; as *Bertie* she could never have kept it from us."

CHAPTER XXIX.

WHILST our old friends were thus engaged in this pleasant and cheerful reunion, another scene, quite as entertaining, was being enacted in a much humbler walk of life. Ryder and his faithful friend Leo arrived in due time at their destination.

The old servant had travelled much in his day, and was not in the least disconcerted at finding himself in a foreign city, with a strange jargon of tongues chattering loudly around him. With a small but stout leathern bag held firmly in one hand and the other grasping the strong leash attached to the dog's collar, he pushed steadily on, deeply intent upon his own purpose. Both man and beast looked solemn and earnest, as though filled with the importance of the mission upon which they were bound. His dear little lady—his—and Leo's—mistress was ill, and she should not die without knowing that her old servant had been faithful to her last charge. "Take care of Leo, dear old John!" says she, "for I love him very much." Thus muttering to himself, and talking in a quiet undertone to the dog, the old man stopped at last before a butcher's shop, where, by means of pantomimic signs, he procured a piece of meat which he paid for and tucked carefully under his arm.

Presently he turned into a small inn, and calling the landlord, made him comprehend that he wished for a quiet place in which to feed and rest his dog. He was shown into a comfortable stable, and there Ryder first fed his favourite ; then, taking from his bag a strong brush and comb, groomed him down thoroughly. "She always loved to see your coat shine, didn't she, Leo?—and you and me'll look our best. Yes, that we will. Now, come, we must hurry up, old boy. You and me's not so young as we were, and it is getting late, it is ! Bide here awhile, till I have a turn and freshen meself up a bit. Lie down and wait for me, d'ye hear ? We're going to see Lady Beatrice by-and-bye." Leo pricked his ears, and seemed fully aware of all his master's wishes and plans. He shook himself pompously, then lay down to await further orders. He really seemed to understand, by some strong instinct between them, that something very unusual was about to take place, in which he and his old master were to take a prominent part.

Ryder hurried to the parlour, and having refreshed his inner man with some savoury French stew—the contents of which he felt extremely nervous about, and, therefore, grumbled freely at—he brushed himself up and returned to the stable.

"'Tis late, I know," he murmured ; "but she must not die till she's seen him, and me too, if it can be managed. Lord, don't I love her, almost more than if she were me own ! And she has a tender spot in her heart for her father's old servant, I know she has !" Here he drew his sleeve across

his eyes, and continued : "Come along, Leo ; we're going to see Lady Beatrice—thine old mistress, dog. Goodness knows, she owns little enough of this world's goods now, but *you* be still hers. I've taken care of ye for her ; and you and me's not going to be daunted. It's a case of life and death, and no convent walls—no, nor iron bars, 'll stop us two, will they ? Eh?"

The dog looked up with an expression of ready response in his fine old face. He was so accustomed to sharing the old man's ideas, and following out his notions, that a wonderful bond of union had grown up between them. Besides, during the journey, the old man had talked in a low, confidential tone to Leo about his mistress, and had frequently taken from his inner pocket a soiled but dainty lace handkerchief and a pair of small silk gloves, at the sight and perfume of which the animal had become quite excited. So he trotted freely by his master's side, neither of them heeding the desolation around, but both pondering the assurance that something important was about to occur.

Rat-a-tat-tat-tat. It was a loud and an imperious knock that Ryder levied at the convent door, and hearing it the timid little portress hurried, thinking it to be the doctor, or at least a visitor of importance—so flurried was she that she forgot to peep through the sliding panel—and opened the door at once.

With a set look of determination on his kind old face, Ryder stepped in ; and the dog sprang forward. To the startled and terrified eyes of the

Sister, Leo, in the gathering darkness, appeared like a huge lion; Ryder might be his keeper. Uttering a stifled cry of alarm, she endeavoured to fling the door to, and fled for assistance. But they were safely inside, and it took Leo but an instant to decide in which room lay the object of their search. He sniffed below the parlour door; then whining excitedly, looked up entreatingly at his master. Trusting the animal's instinct, and hearing no voices within, Ryder opened the door and followed the impatient beast into the room.

All was still. The evening air being chilly, a small stove had been lit, and by the light of a shaded lamp he discerned a small low bed with its head against the further end of the room, and thus left free and open at both sides. "Come back, Leo," he commanded in a stern whisper, for the dog was straining hard at his collar—"steady, old boy, wait a minute!"

Sister Marguerite was lying wide awake, and hearing the unusual sounds, raised her head to divine their cause. Was it a delusion, a vision, that she saw in the dim light before her? The forms of those dear old friends—were they real? were they living?

Not for long did she wonder thus. Then the full knowledge of the faithful devotion of these two old creatures—who, hearing of her illness, had come swiftly to seek and find her—flooded her heart with joy and delight. "My Leo!" she cried, "am I dreaming, or is that you?"

Forward bounded the dog, for he knew her voice, and holding tightly to the leash—fearful of the

consequences to her—dragged Ryder. The dog reached her, and rising, half encircled her with his fore-paws ; then, rubbing his delighted head against her face, whined for joy. She put her wounded arms around his neck, and kissed his rough shaggy coat, saying :

“Poor old Leo ! I never thought to see you more. How did you find me ? There now, Ryder, take him down, for the old darling is heavy, and come nearer yourself, and tell me all about it. My precious beauty !” she continued, as the dog yielded very reluctantly to the old man’s efforts to draw him down, “it is you sure enough ; but tell me, John, how on earth did you get here ?”

“How did we get here !” he repeated ; and his jovial face was lit up with exquisite joy, as he strove to force the dog down and keep him quiet. “Oh, never you mind how we did it ; but we only heard last night how ill you were ; and did you think we could let you die without seeing us once again—no, no ! Be quiet, Leo ; down with you, boy ! Here’s somebody coming. I’m ashamed of ye—making such a row.”

True enough there was somebody coming, and more than one, too. In her alarm, the portress had flown to Ma Sœur, and in her excitement had pitched such a tale that it had startled the good lady into immediate action. Surely there had been enough rude work of late to have satisfied the most unruly ? How was it, then, that ruffians should be allowed to intrude within the precincts of her convent at this hour of the evening ? She rose from her seat and, drawing her figure up, walked silently

but rapidly forward. Close behind her followed Sister Francis de Sales ; and behind her again, in more or less alarm and dismay, came three more of the nuns. Oh, kind Heaven, what strange sounds were those which now issued from the interior of the parlour ! The ruffians might have spared her patient—and for almost the first time in her life the good Superioress's nerve failed her. Her face was as white as her *cornette* when she pushed open the door and forced herself forward. There, facing her stood the old coachman, a look of mingled defiance and exultation upon his fresh, ruddy face. His white hair—from which he had removed the silk hat with its bright cockade—shone in the dim light, and the bright gilt buttons on his handsome coat stood out and defined his manly proportions. Leo, looking very large and formidable, took no notice of the intruding party, but sat upright close to the bedside, watching every look and movement of his dear old mistress. Was it some strolling showman with a dancing bear that had forced an entrance ?

“Who are you ? How dare you intrude here !” inquired Ma Sœur, as severely as her dry lips would permit. But Sister Francis de Sales, peering forward, took in the situation more correctly ; she seemed to remember both man and beast, and whispered : “Don't fear, Ma Sœur ! It is all right. No harm is done.”

To the astonishment of her scared companions her voice almost shook with laughter as she went up to the “ruffian” and shook him by both hands. Then stooping, she fearlessly—nay, quite affectionately—patted the huge animal's neck ; who in his

turn appeared to recognise her, for he even turned his gaze away for a moment from his mistress's face and lifted one great paw into her hand.

The sensation of safety and security, following so rapidly upon the fright she received, made Ma Sœur long for someone upon whom to avenge her shaken nerves. Once more she drew herself up, and her eyes flashed with indignation as she inquired from John, in a stern voice, what he meant by this bold and unseemly intrusion. But as her inquiry was couched in highly-flown French, it made no great impression upon the old man. He simply bowed, mentally resolving that, come what might, he would stand his ground; he had got the best of the bargain, and it would take more than a whole houseful of ladies like these to scare him.

"Pardon me, Ma Sœur, but this man is an old English servant of Earl de Woodville's, and he does not understand French."

Sister Francis remembered well the character of the old coachman, and retired into obscurity, vainly endeavouring to stifle her amusement. By this time several more of the community had ventured into the room, and were looking on in wonder and astonishment.

"But wherefore do you intrude into a house like this without permission, and at this late hour?" inquired Ma Sœur, eyeing with cold displeasure the jovial culprit before her. She spoke English well, pronouncing each word and syllable very distinctly.

"Why, ma'am, if you'll only listen to me, I'll explain it all to you as simply and straightforwardly as possible," answered John quite calmly.

"Proceed! I am here to listen to your explanation."

"Why, ma'am," begun the old man, "it's just this how." As he proceeded he warmed to his subject and emphasised his meaning by striking one hand vigorously against the other. "Ye see, I heard tell only yesterday that our young lady—Sister Marguerite, as you call her—was took very ill; and me heart failed me, it did indeed! when I thought that maybe she might die and never see me, nor her dog, no more. For though I know well enough you've took everything from her as once she had, still he's hers yet"—pointing to Leo—"and I can prove it, ma'am. For her father gave him to her as her very own, ye understand, and she lent him to me—*lent* him, mind ye!—to take care of for *her*. Well, when we thought of her ill and suffering, when we got it into our heads that she might die; I, for one, never slept a wink no more. Bless your heart, ma'am, why, her old father hisself, afore he died, told me to look after her. So says I to meself, 'She'd love to see that dog of hers, and he'd love to see her—to say nothing o' me; and neither distance nor ocean shall stop us. Come on, Leo, me old friend,' I says, 'let's make an effort to see her before she leaves us for ever. So off we sets; for the dog he knew as well as I did what we was up to; and, naturally enough, ma'am, we arrives at your door, because we knowed she was here."

"Well, I rapped, important like, and one of you ladies answered; but she was somehow scared of us." chuckled the old man, "and away she flew!

But ye must understand that these here breed o' dogs has wonderful instinct, and never forgets nobody; and no sooner did this one get a sniff into this 'ere domicile than he knowed well which room his mistress was in, and willy-nilly fair dragged me to her room. I was forced to open this door to save a row," he said slyly, with a wicked wink to himself, "and here we are. And now nothing any of you ladies can say will make old John Ryder regretful of what he has done this day. For both me and Leo feels years younger now that we have seen our dear old mistress, and know that she's a bit better."

Ma Soeur was not only a kind, but a sensible woman; and long before John had finished his speech her face had relaxed, and all sign of displeasure had departed from it.

"Well, old man!" she said, looking quite kindly towards him, "it was a well-meant, but a bold action on your part; and though you may think that dear Sister Marguerite looks fairly well, I can assure you that she is very weak, and that excitement is not good for her; so you and your dog——"

"Her dog, ma'am!"

"Well,"—smiling—"her dog, then, must wish her good-night, and leave at once. But I shall not forbid you calling to see how she is to-morrow, if the doctors approve and all be well; and I promise you that none of us will be afraid of you any more."

"Good night, my dear old mistress, then," he said, turning fondly and anxiously towards her.

"Ye'll not be no worse for seeing old John, will ye?"

"Not at all!" she said heartily—"much better; for if I cannot sleep to-night I shall enjoy thinking of all your faithful love and kindness, and it will do me good, dear old John."

"See, I'll leave him here to take care of ye," whispered the old man as he bent over her. "Ye'll like to have him, and I'll feel a deal easier in me mind when I know that he's here beside ye. Good night, and may God have you in His safe keeping." He turned to leave the room.

"Poor old man!" said Ma Sœur in her kindest voice. "But see, call the big dog; you are forgetting him."

"Come on, Leo," said Ryder, in a half-hearted way; but the dog only crouched nearer to the bed.

"Take him away at once! He must not stay nere," insisted Ma Sœur, authoritatively.

"But what if he won't come? Neither I, nor any one here can lift him. I tell ye he'll not leave this 'ere house till his mistress does. You've got to put up with him somehow!"

"But this is preposterous! Surely you can drag him out." Ryder made a great show of doing so; but Leo seemed so displeased, and growled so ominously, that the old man pretended to shrink from him in terror.

"Now, look here, ma'am," he said seriously; "if you'll only let him alone, he'll let you alone and disturb nobody. He'll lie anywhere in this room as quiet as a lamb, so long as he thinks he's guarding *her*. And what's more," he chuckled,

"I'll warrant ye no more burglars will dare to intrude, so long as he's here to protect ye. Think o' that!"

"But a dog, and such a huge monster, too, in a sick-room—it is outrageous. I cannot allow it. He will disturb my patient."

"Ah, I shall love to have him," came in a half-pouting, half-disappointed little voice from the bed.

"There, now—there, now, didn't I tell ye so?" cried the old man, nodding his head exultingly. "Isn't it only accordin' to nater they'd like to be together again! O' course they would! And, begging your pardon, ma'am"—in a tone of injured pride—"he's not a monster. He's a gentleman, he is; and knows how to behave hi'self as such. And"—waving his hand, and looking round with a lofty air of depreciation—"he's been used to a deal finer quarters than these!"

Here there was a sound of ill-disguised laughter from Sister Francis, and a very merry titter from amid the bed-clothes. But Ma Sœur was determined not to be beaten without one last effort. She felt that her dignity and the good order of the convent were at stake. So with a fluttering heart—for she was unaccustomed to, and naturally afraid of animals—she forced herself to assume a bold exterior and a steady voice. Then approaching the obstinate beast, she called out in her most imperious voice: "Go out, dog! go out at once! *Par là.*"

Leo, who had so far been seated with his back to the audience, upon which he had never cast a thought, roused by the words and voice of the

Superioress, rose slowly and with dignity; then turning, he backed towards the wall at the head of the bed, and seating himself defiantly on his hind quarters with an air of possession, looked Ma Sœur up and down with an air of indignant astonishment that seemed to say: "Why all this noise? You mind your own business, and I'll mind mine!"

The Superioress, baffled, could keep grave no longer: even those of the nuns who had not been able to understand perfectly what had passed previously easily comprehended the present attitude of affairs the unwilling hostess and the dogged intruder—and freely joined in the laugh; until Ma Sœur, desirous at last to compromise matters, turned to look for the old coachman. But seeing they were all preoccupied, he had seized the opportunity to make a quiet exit, and finding the door insecurely closed, after his own abrupt entrance, he let himself out quite easily.

Feeling very like a wicked schoolboy, he trudged back to his inn in high spirits, delighted with the strategy and good luck that had enabled him to foil "those ladies' silly notions," and to leave those two, so dear to him, rejoicing in each other's society. "Lord, how happy they'll be!" he chuckled aloud. "Why, they'll have so much to say to each other! They've not met for two whole years—just think o' that. Why, the very sight o' that dog 'll do her a world o' good."

"Poor little Sister Marguerite," said Ma Sœur, going as close to her as she dared, "I am terrified lest all this unfortunate disturbance may have upset you dreadfully."

"Oh, dear, no!" answered the little hypocrite, uncovering her merry countenance. "Forgive me, Ma Sœur, but I have not enjoyed anything so much for I don't know how long. There has been enough sorrow, sin, and trouble of late to break one's heart; that makes it the sweeter to see the unselfish and faithful love of these dear old creatures; and knowing them as I do, the scene has been to me a right merry one. Leo is a love! He will do anything I command him to. Won't you, dear?" she said fondly.

The Superioress was silent. She watched the dog as he looked at his old mistress with eyes expressive of the most faithful canine affection; she saw him rub his great head so gently against her injured hands, as though fearful of hurting her; and heard him whine as though in answer to her words, as she addressed him in a fond language all her own. Alas! she feared she must let the intruder have his way.

"Well, Sister Marguerite," she remarked at last, shaking her head with playful disapproval, "you are a nice little nun to have so many steadfast friends. Just be kind enough to inform me in future, please, how many more of them you expect, that I may be better prepared for their accommodation."

CHAPTER XXX.

DE WOODVILLE slept little that night. That which his brother had revealed concerning his unfortunate friend had roused within him a desire for immediate action. He could sit still no longer ; the spirit of impulsive energy so characteristic of his sister, seemed for the time to have taken possession of his mind. He felt he must be up and moving ; he must use every force and device to free from his long and unjust incarceration poor Edmund Leadbitter.

At an early hour, therefore, the following morning he called at the Convent door to inquire after, and, if possible, to see his sister. But Ma Sœur shook her head.

"You cannot see her, sir. She is better, and has just fallen asleep ; I dare not disturb her now."

"You are *sure* she is better?" he inquired, anxiously.

"*Certain* of it. She has splendid spirits, a good constitution ; her temperature has fallen and her pulse is calmer ; so I have now great hopes of her recovery."

"Thank God !" he ejaculated firmly ; then there was a pause, during which he appeared perplexed by conflicting feelings. Presently he resumed the

conversation, looking the while with a penetrating gaze at his companion.

"If you are really so hopeful regarding my sister's present condition, and can assure me that I cannot, by remaining near her, materially aid her recovery, I am inclined to return to England and endeavour to procure the release of a dear friend from a very unjust punishment. Tell her that I am leaving in order to see justice done to my friend, Edmund Leadbitter."

"Yes, I understand something of that sad case, and will deliver with joy your welcome message. I am sure that the pleasure it will afford Sister Marguerite will serve as a grateful tonic to her. In fact, I know well that she would much rather feel that you were thus occupied, than that you should linger here."

"That is just the point which was troubling me—the fear lest she might feel I had neglected her in her present critical condition."

"Then you may safely cast out of your mind all doubt on that score; for I can assure you that our dear little Sister has, from the first, been filled rather with concern regarding her late patient's brother, than with anxiety as to herself. Nay, I feel quite justified in stating that the knowledge of your strenuous endeavours with regard to your friend will greatly forward her own recovery."

"I am sincerely glad to hear that your views coincide so exactly with my own, Ma Soeur. With your permission and assurance, I will return to England at once, for I am filled with unrest until this business of poor Leadbitter's is cleared up."

And so they parted ; he rushing off to bid adieu to Marie, and inform her of all his plans, and she to resume her arduous duties.

It was not until the afternoon of the following day that the long divided members of "The United Kingdom" were permitted to come together once more. So excited were Marie and Madge at the prospect of seeing their dear old friend again, that with their arms around each other, they felt in their anticipation like schoolgirls once more ; for their hearts were still pure and young, and they seemed entirely to lose sight of the fact that they were or ought to be—important and sedate little matrons.

"Dear, dear little Bertie !" cried Marie ; "how delighted she will be to see us."

"And we !—what pleasure for us to look upon her brave face once more," chimed in Madge. "You know, Marie, though we may not tell her so, she is quite a little heroine—a martyr to charity, is she not?"

"Indeed, she is ! Ah, Madge, when I think of old times, and compare them with the present, how convinced I am of the wisdom of God—He knew which of us to choose." And so they chatted on until, by the time they had reached the Convent, they had worked themselves into a state of excitement. Ma Sœur observed the look of bright anticipation on their sweet faces, and had not the heart to damp their joy ; she merely cautioned them gently to be careful, and not to overtax the strength of Sister Marguerite.

In their haste and to their utter astonishment,

they almost fell over the body of old Leo, who, as a faithful sentinel, was keeping guard outside the parlour door.

"Yes, indeed!" interjected Ma Sœur, with a look of injured dignity. "Yes, well may Madame la Comtesse look surprised; but, believe me, the Sister is well guarded! Many of her friends are around her, and they are of a charming variety. The dog is only one of the party who took us by storm a few nights ago."

"Leo, Leo! how *did* you get here?" inquired Marie, stooping low and caressing him affectionately. "Why, I left you safely at home, and you are here before me."

"Go in and ask his old mistress to tell you all about it," replied Ma Sœur, opening the parlour door. "See, this is the room into which she was carried; and as she likes it and is comfortable, we have not moved her yet."

Sister Marguerite was prepared for the visit, and was, perhaps, the calmest of the three, as the old friends hurried forward and sank on their knees at either side of the low bed.

Do what she would the little Countess could not suppress the tears of joy which rushed to her eyes when she saw her oldest and best-beloved friend lying thus helpless before them; and the colour came and went in oppressive waves over the fine face of Madge O'Hagan, and her heart beat fast and painfully, as she marked with a quick eye the traces of hard work and suffering stamped plainly upon dear Sister Marguerite's features. "How delicate, how ill she looks," pondered Madge; and

yet they both thought, "how beautiful and sweet!"

The minutes flew on wings. It was impossible to crowd into so short a time one-half of what they had to ask and to tell each other. Neither could I attempt to describe all the mutual joy and true, honest love and interest, expressed and understood in this their first meeting after their long separation.

"Madge, how is my little Marguerite the Third—that sweet little girl of whom you ought to feel so proud? And, Marie, how fares my little nephew, so like his dear old grandpapa that I love him with a special love?" It made them very happy to tell her all their joys, their hopes, their fears, in hearing which they found her so full of kindness and sympathy; and their hearts were flooded anew with gratitude as they realised so keenly what the loss of her would have meant to them.

Thus marked with happy visits, the days passed on until three weeks had flown, during which time Father de Woodville had been recalled to England, and O'Hagan had been telegraphed for to join the Earl; meanwhile, the dear patient had made rapid progress towards recovery. Nothing that could be done to hasten the invalid's restoration to health was left undone. Paris, too, was vigorously and thankfully settling down to that peace and order to which for so long she had been an absolute stranger. Hope, born of patient endurance, was budding into life once more; even the birds were venturing forth from their hiding places

and twittered their joy at the new and pleasant change of affairs.

One morning Sister Margaret received a letter from the Lady Abbess of St. Benedict's which caused all three both pleasure and pain. Often the trio re-read and talked over the contents of this letter, and whether the little recipient's health really did return, or the purport of this epistle urged her to strenuous exertions towards recovery, puzzled Madge considerably. She leaned entirely towards the latter theory. This is what the Abbess wrote :

“ Knowing of your serious illness, my dearest child, I have refrained from writing as long as, with a good conscience, I could do so ; knowing that if my letter should find you still unable to move, it could but needlessly distress and pain you. Poor old Father Egbert is asking for you daily. He is almost blind, and very feeble, but never a day passes that he does not entreat to know if “ dear little Bertie ” is coming to see him. He seems to forget that you are a nun, and when I try to insinuate that you would certainly be with him, *if you could*, he waves me away with great dignity, assuring me sternly that you *promised* to go and see him before he died, and that Bertie never breaks her word, etc. Often, too, he speaks of Marie and the sweet Scotch nightingale, as he calls Madge, as though he loved to linger in memory over the old children in whom he always took such deep interest. So I feel sure that, though he cannot see your faces, still it would give him genuine delight to hear your voices and feel your presence near him once more.

“ Tell Ma Sœur that a branch convent of your own order has been opened in the little town close by, so that you might spend your convalescent days with us, returning at nights to your own Sisters ; and need I say how, from dear old Father Egbert down to the youngest

novice in the community, we should be delighted to have our dear 'United Kingdom' once more amongst us, and what care we would lavish upon our old sick child."

So Ma Sœur was coaxed into giving the necessary permission; and truth to tell, she was not loth to do so, for in her secret heart she was desirous that Sister Marguerite should be moved from Paris as soon as possible, for change of scene and for rest; and where could she find either better than at St. Benedict's Abbey?

Thus it was arranged that "The United Kingdom" should dwell once more—for a time at least—under the very roof where first the three had learnt to know and love each other.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AND now we will follow De Woodville, as he speeds towards the confines of that hard, cold unfriendly building, upon which poor Marion had gazed with such a forlorn and breaking heart that memorable morning.

Having previously notified his expected arrival at the prison, the Earl alighted at the adjoining town, and securing the most respectable-looking vehicle that he could find, drove at a rapid pace to the quarters of the Governor of the jail, who received him personally, and led him at once into his own private apartments. There they talked very earnestly together for some time, the Governor informing de Woodville of the unexpected visit of Monsieur Camard, and the strange revelations which he had made; also of the discovery of the papers declared by Manfred to be hidden beneath the old altar stone in the ruined abbey, which, if genuine, would establish Leadbitter's innocence at once.

"Anticipating the best result of further inquiries," he continued condescendingly, "I have already given orders for the prisoner to be removed to more comfortable quarters, where the doctor has taken him under his special charge.

He finds him weakly; his constitution has, perhaps, been a little tried of late." And he coughed pompously.

"He was not weakly when he entered this unfortunate place," answered his visitor sternly; "he was as fine, as manly a young fellow as ever trod this earth."

"Probably! In fact, he may have been, for all I know. But,"—carelessly—"men are not sent here, you know, to gormandise on the fat of the land, and to grow burly and strong at their country's cost." The Earl rose abruptly.

"Will you allow me," he asked, "to see and speak to poor Leadbitter, since you own that his innocence is almost proved. Being his friend of long standing, I have suffered much anxiety on his account." The Governor rose slowly to his feet, remarking in an indifferent tone of voice :

"Yes, I suppose you may see him ; but if this is the first time that you have done so since his entrance here, well, you must be prepared to find him much altered—that's all."

"And all you care, too," muttered the Earl to himself, as he curled his lips in the old disdainful way, and looked down with dignity upon the five feet five inches of humanity before him. But there was something in the bearing and look of De Woodville which impressed the Governor with a feeling of respect, and, seeing that he was displeased, he added :

"Well, I will say, that whenever I have seen No. 75, I have noticed that there was an erect and manly look about him ; he wasn't the sort of fellow

to impress one with the idea that he was very deeply dyed in guilt. Still, you know, we get all sorts here, and it would not do for one's heart to run away with one's head in a place like this, would it?" De Woodville vouchsafed no reply, but followed in gloomy silence. The Governor continued: "I have even heard it said by some of the warders that the language and manners of . . . your friend . . . I forget his name, have earned for him among his associates the name of The Philosopher; so calm and stoical has been his conduct at times."

"H'm!" grunted De Woodville savagely. "It would require the strength of a martyr, as well as of a philosopher, to bear up amid such uncouth surroundings and such companionship as poor Sir Edmund has had to submit to for the last three years. It is terrible to think of all he has endured—and so unjustly too!"

"Well, sir," reiterated the Governor, turning sharply round. "I, at least, neither condemned him nor measured his sentence. The judgment and punishment of the prisoners is neither meted out nor commuted by *me*. It is my painful duty to see that the sentence is duly carried out."

De Woodville made no reply, but the further he proceeded the stronger grew the spirit of disgust and pity within him. "What an oppressive air of helplessness pervades this detestable abode," he thought; "these interminable grey walls, scarcely touched by a gleam of Heaven's sunlight to cheer so many heavy hearts! And how many are in

here for *life*? Surely death must come to them as a happy release. God help the poor wretches doomed to pine away their lives here."

As De Woodville made no effort to conceal his disgust, the Governor purposely avoided those precincts where the prisoners were engaged in laborious occupations, and with the aid of a large bunch of keys led the way down long, unfriendly-looking passages, through strong, iron-clamped doors, and across several small paved yards, each of which latter was devoid of trees or the smallest shelter whatsoever.

"Poor Leadbitter!" ejaculated the Earl, gulping down his feelings. "And so these are the scenes upon which alone your kind eyes have gazed for so long. Would that Manfred could have tasted a little of your loneliness and sufferings!"

"Ah, there you are mistaken, sir. Your friend has frequently been out working in the quarries; so he has enjoyed as much change of scene as we could well give him."

"Keen enjoyment that, I should presume," remarked De Woodville, drily.

They paused at last in front of a door as heavily and strongly framed apparently as its neighbours; but instead of inserting the key at once, the Governor slid back a small panel, and after peeping through it himself, beckoned to his companion to do the same, remarking in a slightly injured tone of voice: "Now, sir, come and look for yourself; your friend does not appear so very gloomy or uncomfortable after all, does he?"

De Woodville stepped towards the small embrasure

and looked in, his heart palpitating violently as he did so.

“That man with him has always been the poor fellow’s best friend and comforter; he is one of the prison chaplains—Father Lawrence by name. He has from the first evinced a great regard for No. 75, and has frequently spoken of him to me; but, you know, men of his calling are often too soft-hearted, and, I fear, are frequently deceived.” But the Earl scarcely heard the remark, his attention was so riveted upon what he saw.

The apartment into which he peered seemed lofty, dry, and airy, but as destitute as it well could be of any of those comforts with which the Governor had assured him his friend was now surrounded. He did not know that the few small beds which he saw standing at precise distances apart were considered by the prisoners as very havens of rest and luxury; nor could he realise how many in this same apartment had wept tears of joy when they had heard from the lips of their pastor or physician that their end was near—that their term of dreary punishment was almost over, and that *freedom*, eternal and unbounded, would be theirs for ever. Surely there was often great peace at those death-beds, for there was neither comfort nor luxury to leave, and the ties of nature had been severed long ago; so that when men whose duty it was to speak of hope and repentance had bidden them look up, and know that their term of punishment was completed at last, surely there was more joy and less pain at such death-beds than often attends those of the more wealthy

and favoured amongst us. They, poor fellows, had erred, and rightly society had condemned and punished them: are we all so innocent that no punishment awaits us?

The strong looker-on seemed engrossed in the picture before him. He saw two men—one in the habit of St. Francis, the other wearing the livery of dishonour—sitting close together, evidently engaged in very pleasant and earnest conversation. He, upon whose tall, thin frame hung the shapeless garments lavishly decked with arrow-heads, was seated upon a hard wooden chair, while his arm rested upon the side of a small bed near, and supported his weary head. His forehead looked high and broad, for the once thick brown hair that had clustered over it had fallen away, and what was left had lost its bright warm hue, and was besprinkled with grey. The fine, classic features were drawn and lined as though by suffering and hope long deferred; but in those large eyes the fire of life and honour still lived and burned, revealing in their depths a soul of untarnished integrity.

“And you tell me that she is well, Father,” the listener caught the words; “that she loves me as of old; that you have seen her, and that she told you so? You said all this, did you not? I did not dream, did I—that you bade me hope that our weary trial may soon end—that perhaps friends are coming to my aid. But I am weak, Father, and cannot realise it—so tell me of it all again: I grow stronger as I listen.”

Father Lawrence answered slowly, he must

weigh his words ; he knew not how much the object of his solicitude could endure. " Very lately, then, your brother died, and ere he did so he made a strange confession, which has fallen into the hands of staunch friends to your cause, and the purport of which will assuredly aid and probably commute your sentence."

" You are *sure* of it, Father?" he demanded, and the large eyes were full of eager gratitude as he clutched his kind friend's hand and pressed it reverently to his lips. " Aye, you are pretty sure of it, or you would not breathe a word of it to me. But tell me, quickly, what friends have I left save *her*? Their names, Father?"

" You have, it seems, many, I"—he smiled—"among the rest. But De Woodville heads the list. He is moving Heaven and earth in your behalf."

The eavesdropper started.

" De Woodville! Ah, yes. The name recalls sweet memories. He was always true to me. Would that I could see him once more and bless him for his kindness."

" Here, open the door!" said the Earl impatiently ; and the Governor, applying the key, turned it quickly.

The tall figure pushed rapidly forward : his heart was full almost to bursting ; he scarcely knew whether joy or sorrow was uppermost as he rushed across that cold bare room. Ere the prisoner had found strength to rise, he had reached him and clasped him in a warm embrace. Could this be the proud Earl de Woodville—he whom men oft-times judged to be so cold and haughty?—

this he ! choking back the tears and clasping tightly to him the wasted form of a convict ? Could Sister Marguerite but have witnessed the scene, she must have felt that her prayers and exertions had not been in vain.

The prisoner had heard the door open, and catching a full view of the intruder, with too sudden joy the blood had rushed to his heart as he cried, " De Woodville ! De Woodville ! " then sank half-unconscious into his arms. He felt those strong arms supporting him, the breath of his friend upon his cheek, and heard, as in a dream, the subdued voices as they lifted him on to the bed ; he felt their gentle hands bathe his temples, and yet he made no effort to rouse himself lest he should break the spell of undefined happiness which enthralled him.

" He is very weak," explained Father Lawrence ; " he has held out too long ; but with care he should revive. It was the sight of you "—turning to the Earl—" that overcame him. We were but just speaking of you. However, joy does not often kill."

The Governor was standing, gazing intently upon the prisoner. He was not particularly moved by the scene before him. It did not beseem a man in his position to be sensitive or sentimental. No, he was simply wondering whether, if the prisoner did get his discharge, he would ever live to enjoy his freedom.

The Earl had sunk upon the wooden chair vacated by his friend, and sat gazing with pitiful eyes at the weakened and prostrate form before

him. It was all a great shock to him ; he wondered why some men and women had so much to suffer, whilst others lived such lives of peace and plenty ; and he far from blessed the memory of Manfred when he saw and realised the havoc his wicked conduct had caused.

Father Lawrence continued to chafe gently the thin, hard hands, but he had ceased from bathing the lofty temples. His ministrations were now of a soothing rather than of a rousing nature ; he judged that the prisoner's swoon was not so deep but that it might with safety be permitted and coaxed into a child-like and restful slumber.

As they were thus occupied a warder entered and handed to the Governor, with some ceremony, an official-looking document, bearing on its cover the seal of the Home Office. He turned aside to open and read it. It contained an order of instant release for the prisoner Edmund Leadbitter, based upon the precarious condition of his health as reported by the medical man ; an allusion was also made to the discovery of documentary evidence bearing upon the case, which was engaging the attention of the Minister.

De Woodville almost shouted as the Governor made known to them these facts ; and kind Father Lawrence clasped his hands together and straight to Heaven sped his heartfelt thanks. It had all come so suddenly—at last !

“ Well,” remarked the Governor in an emphatic tone, “ my orders are to release the prisoner and see that he has every care and attention. This begins to look like work. Will you ”—turning to

the Earl—"take upon yourself the responsibility of seeing that he has these attentions, and duly acquaint us with the full address of where you lodge him? I don't think he could be in better hands."

"I shall only be too proud and delighted to do so; and what is more, sir,"—in an exultant tone—"a few weeks hence and all the world will be regretting that he has suffered so long and so wrongfully."

"Very well, then, my Lord; it is settled that I leave you gentlemen to look after the poor man for the present. I will now retire to give the necessary orders, so that this business may be carried through as speedily as possible. Should you choose to remain here you can see them completed for yourselves. I am indeed truly glad, for your friend's sake; and if there should be any matter in which I can aid you, you have but to acquaint me with it and I shall have immense pleasure in obliging you." Bowing low he left the infirmary.

Never had Father Lawrence dared to hope for one-half of what had occurred in the bare space of those few moments. He took off his glasses and wiped them, as well as his eyes; for both were dim and moist, and he could with difficulty see or comprehend what was occurring around. "Poor Leadbitter! brave No. 75—always so full of hope and courage—was to leave these hated walls, God grant, for ever! He had permission to help him forth. What about the little wife, Marion?" He glanced at his watch, then took an envelope from his pocket and, tearing it open, wrote in the clear space inside these words:

"Remain where you are ; you must not return home. I will be with you shortly. Most important and good news awaits you, poor child.—
FATHER LAWRENCE."

The infirmary was situated at an angle of the building and communicated by a door with the only piece of ground that could boast of a plot of grass to relieve its severity. Strong walls protected this favoured spot, and through them a stronger postern door opened into the free world outside. Another door communicated with the kitchen department, and upon this Father Lawrence hammered freely with his stick. It was opened from the inside by a boy who performed odd jobs about this portion of the premises.

"Look here, my boy," said the priest ; "can you read this address ?" The boy spelt the letters out carefully and correctly, then looking up said :

"Yes, I know exactly where that street is ; I have an aunt who lives near."

"Then take it as fast as you can. Ask to see the lady yourself, and wait for a written answer ; bring it back to me *at once*. Now, like a good boy, run as quickly as you can, and you shall be rewarded."

"All right, Father ; I know all the short cuts"—and away he darted.

Once more the kind man looked at his watch. "He is certain to find her in," he thought. "She will be even now waiting for me to call and bid her farewell. How shall I tell her all, the poor little wife !"

As he re-entered the infirmary he found the

doctor had arrived ; likewise an official bearing the very suit of clothes worn by the poor prisoner on his first entrance here.

The Earl and the doctor were in close conversation. It had not taken the former long to acquaint the medical man with the true facts of the case ; and he, being singularly kind-hearted, was sincerely interested in the patient. Already he had examined him carefully and had administered to him a soothing draught—one, he said, which would not lessen the already too feeble action of the heart, but would, he hoped, ensure rest for the poor fellow and give them time to act without unduly exciting him.

“ You see,” he continued, “ his heart was always weak, and the life here has almost killed him. A little longer and it would have finished him off completely. So Father Lawrence and I talked matters over, and when we discovered that there was hope of his release, we took the bull by the horns, determined to save him if possible. As yet there is no permanent disease, and there is every hope that with great care, and by avoiding all excitement, he may pull through—in fact, that he may grow comparatively strong again. His has been a most pitiful case ; and his life now depends, in a great measure, upon his instant removal from these precincts. Now, Father, this is a task in which I know you will gladly join us. Come here and give us your counsel. Where shall we remove him to ? It must not be far distant for the present.”

“ To my house, doctor. Its surroundings are

plain and homely ; the change will not be too sudden ; it is very quiet, and he is accustomed to seeing me near him."

"Well thought of, Father ! We will first change his attire ourselves. It is necessary that he should not be unduly roused nor disturbed just now ; and the attendants here are not trained to be over-delicate valets."

So the official looked on whilst gentle hands divested the inanimate sufferer of his coarse, detestable garments, and clothed him in those softer ones, so much more suited to his delicate nature. There was even something of the sister's touch in the brother's hand as he assisted in this work of charity. And all the time the sick man lay passive, as if in a peaceful slumber. Could Heaven do less in answer to such faith and trust as his had been ? Too weak to help himself, it raised kind hearts and stout arms to tend and bear him.

The officer could not suppress a smile as he witnessed the scornful kick bestowed by the Earl upon the discarded garments of which they had divested poor Leadbitter. How he resented and loathed the indignities and dishonour this garb had represented.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ONCE or twice, as they bore him over the grass-grown plot to De Woodville's carriage, which was waiting outside, Leadbitter stirred uneasily, as though he sought to rouse himself and see what was taking place around ; but the well-known voice of his old friend and comforter reassured him, and bade him rest and be still, for all was well. So, like a happy, helpless child, he obeyed, submitting to the sweet lethargy which overpowered him. He had swooned away under the influence of sudden joy, and the perfume of its welcome presence seemed to linger and soothe his brain.

And now, once more, the sweet breath of Heaven fanned and played upon his pallid cheek ; but no rough fetters bound his limbs ; no harsh words hurried him forward. Charity and sweet brotherly love bore him tenderly in their arms and whispered soft words of kindness and joy.

“And now, by Heaven !” said the Earl between his teeth, as the heavy door closed behind them, “once out of this —— hole, if there be justice on earth, it shall be meted to thee, poor Edmund. My friend, thou art a free man once more !”

“Hush, hush!—such language may excite him should he hear and comprehend it,” remarked the doctor. “Step into the carriage, sir, and we will lift the patient in beside you; and coachman, do you drive very gently to the address the chaplain has given you.”

The man, somewhat astonished at all he witnessed, made no remark, but carefully fulfilled his orders, for which he received praise from the doctor and a handsome acknowledgment from the Earl.

To the surprise and evident consternation of the good brother, the men not only bore their burden into Father Lawrence’s own room, but laid it upon his very bed. This last act so paralysed his usually voluble tongue that he was for the time being rendered almost speechless with horror. His arms and eyes were raised to Heaven in hopeless appeal. “For sure,” he thought, “the good Father has lost his senses.” Now all was settled comfortably. It was long since the poor patient’s head had rested on so soft a pillow, and the doctor looked pleased and satisfied as he held the sick man’s hand and felt his pulse. Had Sister Marguerite been there she would have recognised a strong likeness between this patient and the one for whom she had done and risked so much.

“I think we may take great credit to ourselves,” remarked the doctor freely. “Things could scarcely have been managed more prudently or expeditiously. He’ll do now until he rouses. Here, my good brother, don’t look so scared; but hasten to the kitchen and make the best cup of beef-tea

that it is in your power to produce. The better you feed him the sooner you will get rid of him," he added encouragingly.

"Write down everything that you think would be for his good or comfort, doctor. Spare no expense; my purse is at his disposal," said De Woodville heartily.

"I will assuredly do so, my Lord. I will likewise send a good nurse too, who will relieve Father Lawrence of all fatigue and responsibility."

"I know of one already, doctor! A better could not be found. Let us have no strangers here, I entreat. I speak of his wife."

"His wife!" and the doctor gave a low whistle of surprise. "Is she so near, then? No, no, Father. We cannot be too cautious; we must move very, very slowly. He ought not to see her yet."

"Then I shall procure help for the kitchen; and the brother and I will tend him until his wife is permitted to do so. By the way, I must go and tell her of all this."

"No, again, Father; you must remain where you are. He will rouse himself shortly, and it must be from your lips alone that he first learns where he is. Do not tell him too much; ease his mind; satisfy his curiosity; and persuade him to take plenty of good but light nourishment; and, above all, to rest both mind and body as much as possible. I have observed what great influence you have over him, won doubtless by long kindness and sympathy. Cannot you, sir,"—turning to the Earl—"be the bearer of a message to his wife?"

"Only too gladly. Give me her address, and I will set off at once."

"Stay," said the priest, drawing De Woodville aside; "I must explain matters more fully to you. Let me speak to you apart." They were closeted together for some time; after which, in due course, a fly drew up at Marion's lodgings. She was seated by the window in the humble first floor apartment, waiting and watching for the priest's promised visit, when, to her surprise and consternation, she recognised Earl de Woodville as he stepped from the vehicle. She heard his loud rap at the door, and the distinct tones of his voice as he enquired if Mrs. MacDermot was in, as he wished particularly to see her. Then, with a beating heart, she heard the echo of his firm tread upon the stairs, preceded by that of her landlady, who, filled with awe, led the way herself. There was such a decided air of authority about the visitor that the woman was secretly convinced he could be no one less than a limb of the law—a detective in disguise, no doubt, and hers a house of such noted respectability too. She was "hard of hearing," and so had not caught his name; and her eyesight did not permit her to decipher without her glasses what was written upon his card. Any way, she'd "see the end of this business."

It was a sharp, quick knock that she gave at her lodger's door, and in a strained voice, with pallid lips, Marion cried, "Come in!" whilst with trembling limbs she rose to receive her visitor. Had he come to convey to her the good news spoken of by

Father Lawrence? or why was he here? Would he know now who she really was?

To use the good landlady's own words, she was "struck all of a heap, quite flabberghasted like," as lingering curiously, she witnessed what followed.

"Lady Leadbitter," said the Earl, bowing graciously and advancing to meet Marion, whose hand he pressed warmly within his own, "you have succeeded in hiding from us your identity for so long, but, thank God, we are permitted to know you at last."

"O, Lord de Woodville, pleaded the poor lady, flushing with timid pleasure at his kind words and manner, "you would not blame me if you knew all that I have suffered."

"I? We—blame you? How could we? Father Lawrence has just told *all*; and would that you knew how I honour and respect you for the part you have played." Here the door closed very softly after the landlady's exit. "Listen to me, dear lady—and oh, what joy it is to tell you—your poor husband has left that dreary dungeon, please God, for *ever*. We have but now carried him thence."

"What! He is not dead?" she gasped, shaking from head to foot.

"No, no, God forbid! An order arrived from the Home Secretary— I was there when it came—for his immediate release, ostensibly on account of his health, but really, I trust, because his innocence is practically established."

With the greatest difficulty she controlled her voice sufficiently to ask, "Where—where is he now?"

He pressed her gently into a chair, and sitting down beside her, begged of her to be calm. Then in soothing but glad tones he related to her all that had occurred within the last few hours, enlarging upon the joy and happiness they had all experienced in being able to aid in his friend's deliverance, and the determined manner in which he and others were setting about to prove to the world her husband's perfect innocence."

She listened and drank in greedily every word he uttered. She thanked him; oh, how she thanked him from her heart, and blessed God for His goodness: the tears coursed down her cheeks, but she could not utter a word. He had much difficulty in soothing her. He had not realised before how deep and unselfish can be a true woman's love.

"Take me with you," she said at last; "let me see and speak to Father Lawrence." He took her little bag and gently supported her down the steep and narrow staircase; then handed her into the fly which was waiting outside. She had already paid her bill; nothing was owing here. With the aid of her glasses the landlady had deciphered the name upon the visitor's card, so bursting with curiosity she and the whole of the Palmer family, screened by the shabby lace curtains, watched from the parlour window the departure of their strange lodger and stranger visitor.

As Mrs. MacDermot, Marion had usually evaded her master's presence. She never felt quite certain how he might regard her did he know that she was the wife of a man convicted of fraud; and yet,

now that he knew everything, here was she seated beside him with only the feeling of a great, deep gratitude welling up in her heart; for who could have been kinder, more thoughtful, or more considerate towards her than he had been?

"Will you mind," he said kindly, "if I tell the driver to stop at the first telegraph office we pass? My wife and many another will rejoice at the message I send them."

"Do so, by all means. God alone knows how deeply I thank you and all for your kind help and sympathy. The dear little Countess!—how good, how kind she has always been to me!"

"You must tell her so, for she blames herself unmercifully for not having guessed your secret long ago, and done more for you."

"It would be a base heart that could blame *her* for unkindness, even in thought, to anyone." He knew how true were her words, and he liked to hear them. They drew up presently; and after despatching his wires, the Earl sprang lightly in beside his companion, and a mischievous smile lit up his face.

"There, now," he said, with an air of amusement, "I guess that I have given those dear ones something to occupy their little brains and tongues with for the next few days. My dear sister deserves to hear the glad news."

Marion did not learn until a few hours later all that she and her husband owed to Sister Marguerite.

That same night she was seated in the very room from the window of which Father Lawrence

had gazed so wistfully only a short time ago. In the twilight Marion and her kind host were enjoying a happy conversation.

“He has borne the removal so well, and looks so very peaceful and contented, that I feel sure he will be allowed to see you before many hours are over. You see, he has so hoped and prayed for this by day and dreamt of it by night that it is not all so strange to him as the doctor thinks. Such faith as his I never saw. I was standing quite near to him when he awoke, and I watched him closely. First his eyes fell upon me, and gradually they filled with a soft, child-like trust; then his gaze wandered slowly over the ceiling and walls, lingering with unmistakable pleasure upon each picture hanging there. Last of all he turned them to the mantelpiece, where they rested and centered in loving gratitude upon the large crucifix suspended above.”

“ ‘Well!’ I said softly; and he started as I spoke. ‘Do you not feel better?’

“ ‘I am so glad to hear your voice,’ he exclaimed. ‘Give me your hand, Father. I feared that I was dreaming.’

“ ‘No, it is all real,’ I said, pressing my other hand upon his brow. ‘You are in my house. All that awful misery is over, and you are to grow strong again.’

“ ‘Father,’ he replied—and he looked so happy as he said it, holding my hand so tightly—‘Father, I told you it would come! I will obey you, for you are my best friend. But you will tell *her*—my little wife!’ Very gently and quietly I

promised him everything if he would but obey me, as I am sure he will ; so wait a little and endeavour to be patient."

"How easy the task so long as he is happy," she said. "My poor husband is right ; you have indeed been our best friend. We have contracted a debt towards you that neither of us can ever pay."

"No, dear lady ; there you are wrong. I have done my little best for him ; the doctor also, and De Woodville ; we have all done what little we could, but we have not been his best friends : you must go beyond us ; there are others who have done far more for him than we."

"You mean that dear little Sister of Charity—who all but gave her life in our cause ? True, no one could have done more."

"Yes, she and all of us were instrumental one way and another ; but I am convinced that it was even a power beyond us all that set us all in motion."

"How do you mean, Father ?"

"Just this. I am perfectly convinced that your husband's great and unswerving faith in God's goodness and mercy, even when things looked blackest and darkest, moved the heart of God in his behalf ; and to accomplish His will we were the instruments chosen. I tell you, my child, that his heroic faith, his constant patience amidst the severest trials, have been an object lesson I shall never forget. Have courage, for he will yet be restored to perfect health."

"And you will permit me to remain near and

assist in the housekeeping?" she pleaded. "I have learnt to be such a clever cook, and will promise to send in the most delightful dainties for him, if I may."

Yes, she might lodge close by; he could not refuse her that comfort.

The following day De Woodville set out to hasten with all his influence the tardy process of his friend's exoneration.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

It was a right merry party that slowly wended its way through the dear old familiar grounds of St. Benedict's one glorious afternoon in June.

How long ago it seemed since, as schoolgirls, together they had left its kindly shelter—weeping, yet ready on the instant to dry their tears in youthful and expectant wonder as to what the life upon which they were then entering, and this strange, beautiful world, held in store for each of them. How different beyond expression had been the destiny of each from what she had then surmised. Nature, too, that day had seemed to veil her face and partake of their despondency, for it had rained copiously; but this day they would not even shade their eager eyes, which were almost blinded by the brilliant sunshine, as in dazzling splendour it strove to welcome them back, and forced into prominence every well-remembered curve and angle, and gilded with a glory all its own each pinnacle and spire of the dear old place. They leaned backwards and forwards and in all directions, to catch every first and possible glimpse of their girlhood's home, and with the greatest enjoyment and animation drew each other's attention to each familiar object as they passed. Now

they drove under the old archway and looked up with delight at the coat of arms and the familiar "Pax" engraven there. By their joy at beholding it once again, one might have supposed they had almost expected the elements to have erased it ere this. Yes, the members of the "United Kingdom" had seen many faces and loved them; had learnt by experience many things, sweet and bitter; had endured them, too, since last they stood together in the dear old precincts. Yet they were intensely happy this day; for, through all, they had been faithful to God, their duty, and each other, and He had blessed them.

I know of few joys sweeter than that of visiting the dear loved home of youth, especially when we know for a certainty that it will be little changed or altered, and still filled with kindly and expectant hearts, all yearning to welcome and embrace us.

Sister Marguerite forgot her own bodily pain and weariness in her joy at the thought of seeing so many kind friends again, but most of all in the knowledge that her presence would bring comfort and happiness to one who, in the days of her wilful girlhood, had not only shared and soothed her grief, but with authority had rebuked and shown her the sin and folly of her own proud heart—one to whom she felt she owed so much.

Marie, too, was happy. How peaceful and sweet was this visit! No spot on earth, however dear could ever be quite the same or recall half so many pleasant memories to her mind.

Madge was filled with present and expectant

joy. The home she was nearing contained such friends as we are permitted to make but once in a lifetime. Was not this the very home that had opened its kindly doors to poor Margaret the First and her brave but forlorn daughter Madge when, almost destitute and forsaken, they had sought refuge there? Aye, and had even laid the poor mother to rest within its peaceful shelter! Her heart might well throb, then, as she neared its loved portals.

And Leo, faithful Leo! he too was of the party. Seated low between the trio, his aged head resting on the lap of her he loved so well, her kind voice sounding in his ear, and one dear scarred hand pressing tenderly his shaggy coat, he too was very content and happy. With a satisfied heart and proud smile, as of duty faithfully accomplished, old John Ryder had bidden "Our young lady" a reluctant farewell, and had returned to his duties at his master's home; but he had returned alone. "He had left *her* dog to mind her, though!"

As they neared the great entrance Madge sprang lightly to the ground, and having assisted her companions to alight also, grasped the big bell and rang it with a vigorous pull.

So there once again, on the old familiar ground, stands "The United Kingdom." She, the once self-willed, merry Bertie, clothed now in the lowly garb of charity; her winsome face grown sweeter still from its outward expression of unselfish kindness and inward peace. Close beside her stands the once shy, blushing Marie. Though she had never sought wealth or rank, yet the world had lavished

them upon her. But the coronet pressed lightly on her brow; free from all false pride and filled with love and kindness was the still gentle heart of Ireland's daughter. And little Madge, heretofore so doubtful of her own virtues and strength, stands there also again. She has increased not only in stature and comeliness, but in beauty of mind and character also. She has traversed the valley of pain and sorrow, has drunk at the fountains of loneliness and suffering, and has learnt to bless the Hand that led her there; so when peace and plenty came she was prepared to use them well, and no heart turns to her in vain.

And now, in justice to this famous convent, I am bound to relate that upon this day at least it broke the record: for, instead of the regulation wait of—we will not say how long—which usually occurs at such places, the great bell had scarcely ceased pealing ere the doors flew open to admit the cheerful guests; and what is still more worthy of note and admiration is the recorded fact, that no sooner were the visitors ushered into the old familiar guest-room, than they were met by the Lady Abbess and her Sisters.

Perhaps a bright little sentinel, who had watched from her turret on high the approach of the guests, could in some measure have accounted for the unusually speedy answer to their summons. A pair of clear girlish bright eyes had spied the carriage ere the inmates of it had caught more than a glimpse of the Abbey, and excitedly she had called to the companion who stood near to guard her:

"There, Mary! Now I see them coming; yes, indeed I do! I saw the carriage pass that open space between the little woods."

"Now, Miss Margaret, I'll back me own eyes, for distance like, agin anybody's; and though I was staring me hardest, I never saw no sign of naught like a carriage."

"Of course not, you old silly. I know you so well. You were staring, no doubt, old dearie; only not out of this tiny window, but at me, lest I should fall. There now"—playfully—"deny it if you can."

"Rubbish, child!" But the hard mouth could not repress the smile that broke over it.

"There it is again, Mary! Now climb up here and look for yourself; then you will believe me! I see the carriage quite distinctly; and there are three figures inside; and—oh, quite plainly—I can see the white *cornette* of darling Sister Marguerite. They'll soon be here! I'll run and tell Lady Abbess."

Down she sprang from her rickety perch, shaking the old turret floor, and Mary's heart also; and away she bounded, light as a fawn, this favoured child—little Marguerite the Third—to the Lady Abbess' side.

"The little elf!" thought Mary, as she followed her flying charge; but there was a very soft light in her old eyes as she continued to ponder within herself, "Had ever bairn such a bold, daring spirit as this little one, I wonder? Nivver, no nivver! And yet how sweet and gentle she can be! Well, anyhow, she shall have her own way, the darling."

Old Mary can't find the heart to check her bright spirit ; sorrow will come soon enough to mar that bonnie face. I'll not begin it." It seemed as though all the love for her two former mistresses was rolled into one, doubled, and trebled for this little girl—so deeply did Mary love and admire her.

"Dear Mother, they are coming ! They will be here directly ; and dear Sister Marguerite may be tired."

The Lady Abbess—apparently so little aged or altered—smiled cheerfully at the girl's sweet, excited face, remarking as she stroked one little hot hand :

"Then, Margaret, dear child, since you cannot walk, run and meet your mother. How like in face and form to her grandmamma, the dear companion of my youth, is this sweet child," soliloquised the nun ; "and yet, whence has she derived that bold, unerring spirit which, even in very childhood, marks her out as one almost fit to command and lead. I marvel much what destiny Heaven has in store for her. It has entrusted much also of wit and talent to her keeping."

But little Margaret had another duty to perform. Between herself and old Father Egbert there had sprung up, strangely enough, a sudden and strong attachment, and to-day they had a secret together. So away she rushed down the very corridors and passages that Beatrice de Woodville had traversed, when, in defiance of rules and etiquette, she, yet a schoolgirl, was determined to bid her old friend farewell.

But gently—so gently—lest by her haste she should disturb or startle the dear old man, the child first knocked at his door, then opened it. Very softly she stole across the room : but if his eyesight was dim almost to blindness, his hearing was still keen ; and catching the sound of her light footfall, he raised his venerable head and smiled his welcome.

Quite naturally she slid down beside him, and putting her little face near his long white silvery hair, whispered—because it was a secret :

“They’re coming, Father Egbert ! They are close to now ! And your little favourite, Bertie, about whom you tell me all those nice stories, she’s coming too ; and you and I are glad, are we not ?”

“Yes, yes, yes !” replied the old priest eagerly. “I knew she would come. She said she would. Will she be long, my child ? and are little Marie and Madge with her ?”

The child smiled sadly but kindly to herself as she answered : “Yes, dear Father ; they are all three together. Shall I run and tell them not to be very long before they come to you ?”

“Yes, little one : tell Bertie old Father Egbert has waited so long to see her. Ah ! I hear the sound of carriage wheels on the gravel drive. Can it be they ?” He chuckled to himself : “And they think here that I know nothing of this visit.”

The girl’s eyes looked fondly yet sadly once more upon the venerable old man before her. “How pretty, how beautiful he must once have been,” she thought ; “since even now he looks so grand.” There is, after all, a close link between

old age and childhood ; for how often do we not see the feeble steps and habits of old age in beautiful harmony with those of early childhood. And little Margaret O'Hagan seemed to sympathise with and understand the aged man so thoroughly, as she bent over him and endeavoured to coax him, as she might have done a dear companion of her own age, by saying sweetly :

“Now you will have a little doze, won't you? Then when they come you will not feel so tired.”

She shook up the cushion at the back of his chair, stroked his white hair, and kissed with reverence his aged hand ; then darted off to meet her mother. He smiled to himself as he heard her close the door. He liked her touch ; and her voice—he had heard it somewhere before ; it was familiar to him. “What a bright little child it is,” he thought. But somehow he could not realise that she was “little Madge's” daughter.

To old Mary's astonishment she came up with her little charge, who was now sauntering slowly and thoughtfully down the long cloister leading to the guests' apartments.

“Why, my bairnie—not seen thy mother yet?”

“No, not yet, Mary”—slipping her little hand in hers—“I thought they might like to have the first meeting all to themselves ;” and then, looking up doubtfully, “you know mother doesn't know we are here.”

“She'll not be cross ; don't fear, child. She gave you her word that you might come to France and see ‘Sister Marguerite,’ as they call her now.”

“Yes —slyly—“but, don't you see, I want to

give Lady Abbess the first chance of telling her all about it. You know she made all the arrangements herself. Do you think she has had time to tell her by this?"

"Plenty, my pet. Go in now, and I'll warrant me they'll all be glad enough to see thy bonnie face." She opened the door as she spoke, and pushed the child inside.

Seated in the centre of a happy group was that famous woman who, in her gentle wisdom, had guided and supported so many of her sex, and, by her own eminent example and wise counsel, had won such a place in their hearts that the love and esteem wherewith they regarded her seemed unbounded. There she sat with them all clinging around her, as though they were yet the veriest children. I have said she was to all appearance little altered; but to those whose office it was to be in close attendance upon her person, it was often painfully evident that at times she suffered much bodily pain; which fact, however, she strove hard to hide from the rest of the community.

Now, seated amidst so many of her children—for dear Mother Agatha, as also several of the other nuns, was present as well—there was not one amongst them brighter or more cheerful than herself. Had she not always loved each member of "The United Kingdom" with a special love? What pleasure, then, to see them again, each true to her vocation in life, even as she would have had them to be.

The knock at the door was so soft and low, and it was opened so gently, that all did not at first

hear or observe either ; but Madge, who was sitting opposite, looked up at the moment, started, then sprang to her feet on perceiving the small apparition, exclaiming : “ Margaret, my child, *you* here ? ”

But the look of surprise was almost instantly changed to one of joy, as she stepped forward and clasped the rosy culprit to her bosom, embracing her heartily. It was such an unexpected delight to see her little girl again. When her mother released her, little Margaret sprang to Sister Marguerite’s side, and, sinking upon her knees beside her, hid her face upon her shoulder, weeping out the words, “ Oh, I am so glad you did not die ! ”

“ Dear little heart ! ” answered the gentle Sister, folding her arms around the slender form. “ Thank God, indeed, that we are spared to meet again ! Once I had almost feared that I might never see our little Margaret more. You and I, dear child, will have many long talks now. We have not forgotten our little secret, have we ? ”

Then Lady Abbess explained to them how the child in her trouble had written to her, telling her of her mother’s promise, viz., that should Sister Marguerite recover, she, under Mary’s charge, might visit France and see her once again ; and how, after thinking matters over, she had taken upon herself so to arrange that all might meet together at St. Benedict’s Abbey.

Aunt Marie, every one, was glad to see the child and have her near ; so all was well, and she took a place amongst them, which even then

seemed to have been waiting for her; and from that day a sweet joy and contentment filled the little maiden's soul.

"And how about Father Egbert?" inquired his old favourite. "How is the dear old man?"

"Better, I think," responded Lady Abbess. "But I did not advise him of your coming, fearing that should your strength fail, you would be unable to accomplish the remainder of the journey to-day, and the disappointment to him would have been very great." The child coloured slightly as she heard this and drooped her head, but said nothing. She knew that she and the old priest had spoken together daily of the expected visit, and they had appeared to understand each other so easily. Their talking about it, she thought, had never seemed to upset him in the very least.

"I wonder how he will recognise you all again," remarked Mother Agatha, "for at times he cannot see at all. As soon as the bell sounds for Compline you must go to him, Sister Marguerite."

"Yes, dear Mother; I am longing to do so." Before they had found time to say a quarter of what was in their minds that bell did ring; but Marie and Madge had shown with pride the photographs of the little ones at home, and had told how the little girls at Baron Court were only waiting until they were old enough to go, as their mother had done before them, and seek for tuition and love 'neath St. Benedict's care.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FATHER EGBERT awoke from the doze which, in accordance with the child's desire, he had been enabled to enjoy : he awoke, as we sometimes do, with a vague impression of pleasure or pain holding an undefined sway over our drowsy minds. He smiled to himself as these thoughts gradually took more tangible form, and clasping his hands together, sat very still, like one buried in deep thought.

The Compline bell had ceased ringing. Sister Marguerite needed no guide along the old familiar way. She was walking very thoughtfully, and—unlike herself—very slowly, down the long passages which separated the guest-rooms from those of Father Egbert. Her mind had reverted back, as it frequently did, to the memory of that dear parent, whom she had loved so tenderly, and whom God had seemed fit to take to Himself whilst she was still a wilful girl. He had gone : and now she was permitted to visit, probably for the last time, her dear old spiritual Father, this venerable, saintly old man, this link of the past, whose blessing she craved to receive ere he too should leave her for the unknown. A great feeling of pleasure suffused her mind and seized upon her

whole frame, when she realised how sweet a thing it was to be unfettered save by the ties which bound her to God, free to spend herself, for Him, upon His creatures—to feed them, to clothe them, to tend and comfort and pray for them in all their wants and miseries, and to be blessed by Him in return. Dear old Father Egbert, how good he had been to her in days gone by! Her heart beat faster as she neared his room, and the hand that was once so fearless trembled now and caused her knock to be almost inaudible when she reached his door. “Perhaps he sleeps,” she thought; “I will look and see.”

No, there he sat; his hands still clasped together, a smile upon his benevolent countenance, his sightless eyes instinctively raised towards the crucifix which stood upon a table near. He turned his head sharply, and a look of joyful expectation shone upon his features as he caught the sound of her firm little tread upon the floor. She spoke not a word until she knelt at his feet, then taking his hand, she said in a voice filled with emotion:

“Dear Father Egbert, I have fulfilled my promise: I have come to aid you, and be blessed.”

He started when he heard her voice; but his own was firm as solemnly he raised his hand above her bowed head and said:

“Bertie, my dear child! May God in His mercy and power bless you as I do this day, now and for ever.”

Then a look of supreme joy broke over his venerable face as he pressed her hand in his, and

thanked God that he had been spared, if not to see, at least to feel her presence near him ere he died.

"I knew you would come, but you have tarried long, dear child. You do not forget the promise you made to visit and minister to me in my last illness? Speak, Bertie; for though I cannot see your face, your voice is dear to me; there is a power and ring in it that floods my failing memory with happy thoughts, and recalls faces and scenes I had almost forgotten. Like the swell of a strong spring tide which carries on its breast remnants of the past and secrets of the deep, your voice has recalled to the surface of my mind images and impressions I had thought lost for ever. Why did you not visit me sooner?"

"Father, I have been ill; I could not come."

"Poor little Bertie! I knew there was something wrong. Are you stronger and better now? for, alas! I cannot see you."

"Much, much better, and as soon as I could travel I came to you."

"That is like you; and you have made me feel so happy. No cloud now rests upon my mind. Did you not kneel here once before, and did I not bless and send you on your way? You were going then to devote and consecrate your life to deeds of charity for God's sake. And did you do so?"

"I did, Father."

"And you belong *entirely* to Him?"

"Entirely, and for ever."

"And the rich, your old companions, know you not now—perhaps despise you?"

“That does me good, not harm.”

“Aye, but the poor, the lowly, and the suffering bless you, child?”

“Always, Father.”

“And you are happy, Bertie?”

“Very, very happy; so happy, Father, that oftentimes I marvel how so much of peace and joy should fall to my lot.”

He raised his sightless orbs upwards, and laying his hands upon her head exclaimed—

“Did I not say—did I not prophecy years ago, that this child should bless and be blest? Aye, God will reward her a hundredfold for all she has done for Him. I have grown old, dear child, and have become a heavy trial to all around me. I would fain lay down the burden of this life, were it Heaven’s will, and begin that new one above. Never, kind Bertie, will these aged eyes look upon your bright innocent face again. But we shall meet at His feet. I shall *see* you there—yes, meet you never to part from you again.” She took his hand and pressed it to her lips with respectful fervour, whilst he continued: “You must not weep when you close my eyes in their last long sleep. No, do not mourn for me; but pray much for me: pray that my soul may find favour before God. And I—I will watch over you, and ask that my old child may remain faithful till death. We shall not be long separated!—life is *very* short.”

“Do not speak like this, dear Father! I cannot bear to hear it!”

“But I must say what is in my mind; and you must be kind and patient, and listen to me, for

you will not have me with you long : then you will be sorry that you did not hear all that the old man had to tell you—and I have waited so patiently to say it ! Until I heard your steps cross the room, I was filled with doubtful fear lest the good souls here, through mistaken kindness, would prevent your visiting me to-night."

"Then you knew that we had arrived? You were expecting me ! Who told you of it?"

"Ah !" and he smiled archly ; "they thought here to deceive the old blind man ; but Heaven sent one of its own to advise him of your approach."

"Who was the angelic messenger, Father?"

"A little child ! One so guileless of heart, so full of gentle thought, that she must indeed be fair to look upon. We have sat together and talked of you, and she loves you dearly. Do you not call her 'Margaret the Third'?"

"O, the daring little nymph !" laughed Sister Marguerite, "to steal a march upon us thus."

"Nay, dear child, forbear to scold her ; for she has been a comfort and a joy to me. I have loved to listen to her wise though childish prattle. Tell me, if you can, from whom she has derived that voice ; 'tis pleasantly familiar ; I have heard it, so it seems to me, years ago."

"Does it not sound like dear old Madge's—or rather, does it not bear in its sweet tones a vibration, a ring, as of the two Margarets' voices even as she bears their features blended in her little face !—for truly she is Madge's child."

"Madge's child !" he repeated slowly, covering his sightless eyes with his aged hand as though in

puzzled thought. "This little one the child of our own Scotch nightingale? Yes, yes—it must be so; for 'tis her voice that has so stirred me in the child. I begin to see it now. That is why I have felt so drawn towards her. I knew she belonged to us by some mysterious bond, but could not fathom where the links were laid. Alas, this but proves to me how very old I am—how I have outlived the allotted time. Where is our little Madge? and the gentle little Marie also? Where are your old companions, child?—that I may bless them ere I die."

"Awaiting the summons to visit you, Father."

"Go, call them: bid them come at once! No, no; stay!" he cried hastily, as she rose to her feet. "Do not leave me; I cannot bear that you should go. See, I will touch the bell and convey my message to them thus; and do you draw chairs closer up, that I may have some of the dear old children around me once again. I like to hear their voices near me. It may be for the last time on earth that this pleasure is permitted me."

"Nay, say not so, dear Father, I do entreat you not."

"But wherefore not, dear child, when I feel and know it to be true. And now that I have met you once again, and heard from your own lips that you too belong so entirely to God, that for and in Him alone you live, why I feel at ease and wishful now to die."

"It is well to be thus resigned; and should Heaven will it so, how could I have it otherwise. But to me you have ever been the truest of guides

and the gentlest of teachers. Think you not but that I shall miss you. What were you not to me when my poor father died? Ah, Father Egbert, I shall indeed miss you sorely!" Her voice trembled, but he could not see the tears that welled up and gathered in her eyes.

"No, you will not miss me much; for here I am almost useless now. But there—there—in the presence of our God, dear child, there, at least, I can intercede for you, and await with joy until the short span of your little life be o'er; when you will join me once again and take up, and complete in all its perfection, that life for God which under such difficulties you have begun here below. But hark! if I mistake not, here come our other welcome guests."

As he spoke the door flew open and little Margaret, flushed and eager, bounded to his side, exclaiming, "Dear Father, they are all here now. What a nice long talk you have had with Sister Marguerite."

He endeavoured to rise and greet his dear old children, but was unable to do so; and for the first time they perceived how infirm and feeble he had become. Little Margaret, kneeling quietly upon a low stool at his feet, alternately stroking his aged hand and gazing with childish awe into his kind old face, was so impressed by all he said that it seemed to her she had listened to and been blessed by one of God's own saints. They all felt that during the time they talked together—telling him, as they did, of all their various joys, and the many changes that had occurred in the lives of

each—that his intellect was clear and unclouded, that he understood distinctly, and sympathised keenly in all that interested them. Their joy at meeting and seeing him thus was great indeed.

Marie told him how happy she was with her kind husband and little ones, in the beautiful home he remembered so well; and he smiled as he listened to and blessed her, and prayed that her little ones might resemble the good little Marie whom long ago he had crowned with such joy and pride to himself with the school wreath, once so deservedly won.

“And you, Madge, my dear old child,” he continued solemnly—“you who endured the early trials of your young life so staunchly, so bravely—take care of this little treasure”—laying his hand upon the child’s head—“take care of our little Margaret the Third, for in her Heaven has entrusted to you a precious charge. And if in the near future she should ask you aught for God’s sake—should she prefer Him before all else, refuse not her request; for remember, He chooses when and whom He will, and often—almost always—He takes our fairest and our best. Promise me, Madge, that you will present no obstacle to the designs of Heaven in her regard.”

“I will promise, Father, to frustrate no design for God’s honour and glory, whether with regard to my children or any one over whom I have control.”

“There speaks the brave spirit of your mother, little one; hers was always a nature capable of the greatest self-sacrifice. Madge, God will bless you in your children!”

Little Margaret's face was crimson. She had crept to Sister Marguerite's side and hidden it in her lap. Both knew that the dear old priest had guessed their secret. Yes, from the House of O'Hagan St. Benedict claimed a daughter at last.

Under the good Saint's fostering care the sweet child grew up and flourished, and Heaven looking down upon the little maiden this night, accepted and blessed the offering which she made of her whole self to *His* service for ever. In His own mysterious way He had drawn the child to Himself. The world has so many devotees! We must not murmur if some few turn aside and devote themselves with equal energy to the service of the King of Kings.

Young as she was, when she pleaded now to begin her school days, Madge—with her promise to Father Egbert and his words still ringing in her ears—had neither the heart nor will to refuse her child's request.

Scarce an hour had elapsed since they had left the old priest's presence when Sister Marguerite was summoned speedily back to his side.

The assistant chaplain was already there, and was administering to him the last rites, whilst the invalid, whose mind was apparently quite lucid, strove to join in the responses himself. The poor old man was lying upon the sofa, but Sister Marguerite shed no tear—nay, she forced her voice to betray neither tremour nor emotion—lest it might distress the dear departing spirit. Falling upon her knees beside her friend, she slid her arms beneath his shoulders, and uniting her voice with

his answered most fervently the prayers recited by the officiating priest.

Many a soldier, many a weary sufferer, had breathed forth his or her last sigh in those arms. It was in situations like the present that England's Daughter was at her best. There was a power of support, comfort, and solace in her very touch.

Father Egbert passed away as he had lived, peacefully and calmly. He evinced by many a feeble but affectionate sign his satisfaction at her presence there; then, when all the consoling rites were concluded, and the blessing had been pronounced, with a last gentle pressure of the hand he smiled and was gone. It looked as if the dear, saintly old man but slept; and his old child wept not, but thanked God that she had been permitted to see and be blessed by him once again ere he died. No; his children prayed for him, but they could not weep, knowing how he had yearned to go.

And thus we leave "The United Kingdom," where first we found them, happy and cheerful in each other's love 'neath the peaceful, shady glades of dear St. Benedict's.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A HOT July sun poured its brilliant rays upon the gorgeous flower-beds which studded the graceful terraces around the stately home of Baron Court. A grateful breeze tempered the heat, and bore with it the fragrant perfume of Nature's exotic plants and flowers. It soughed and played amid the leaves and branches of the rare old trees, tossed with sportive mischief the crystal drops from the brimming fountains far beyond the rim of their massive marble basin; furled and spread, as though in merry mirth, the bright gay flag which floated from the lofty turret tower. The swallows flew high, their small bodies glistening swift and clear against the deep blue of the cloudless sky.

To-day was a holiday, a fête day at Oakhome. The Lord of the Manor was returning, and with him, in his tender care, the poor innocent gentleman who had suffered so long and so unjustly. In their company was *his wife*, Lady Leadbitter!—she who had lived in their very midst, and been known among them only as the lodge-keeper. The people drew in their breath, and looked askance at each other as they repeated her name. “Lady Leadbitter, indeed, who'd have thought

it?" For it was all out now; that terrible mystery which had hung around her was dissolved at last: but no one in the whole village had ever surmised or guessed it, and some few spiteful hearts had bled in angry confusion when they felt that the merciless weapons of spite and jealousy wherewith they had so freely wounded the lonely Marion MacDermot could now be turned upon themselves by their victim. How little could *they* judge of or appreciate a nature like that of Lady Leadbitter's!

The papers had been full of the whole story. The local *Times* had reaped a small harvest out of its harrowing description of the sufferings endured by the innocent man, and the hard striving and patient endurance of his gentle wife.

It told in thrilling language "of the strange revelations made by a well-known English gentleman, who upon his death-bed had openly confessed before competent witnesses that all the shameful and degrading story which condemned his brother to five years' penal servitude—and life-long ignominy—was concocted by a confederate and himself, for the sole purpose of disinheriting him and securing for themselves the estate of the old uncle. The sudden and tragic death of this uncle had also been unmercifully laid at the door of the supposed defrauder, whose ungrateful conduct was said to have brought about the aged gentleman's death-stroke." The paper went on to describe with reverent, almost patriotic pride, how one, "dear still to them all, had in her office as a Sister of Charity so won upon the heart and good feeling

of the surviving conspirator, that he had confessed all ; and thus, with the aid of the untiring exertions of her brother, Earl de Woodville, she had been the means of restoring to the ill-used baronet his liberty, and establishing for ever his innocence." Nor did it omit to paint in glowing language "the gallant conduct of this brave Sister, in rescuing her charge from the devastating element."

With trembling hands the old coachman had cut out every sentence which spoke of *her*. Reverently he had folded and kissed the print, then had stowed the cuttings away in a well-worn old book that had never left his breast-pocket—one that a little girl with gold-brown hair and sunny violet eyes had once given to him, with these words: "*Many* happy returns of the day, John. I do hope that you will live for lots of years yet. I shall *never* like any coachman half so well as *you*, dear old John." On the fly-leaf of the book was written in a child's handwriting, "To John Ryder, from little Lady Beatrice."

So there was joy this day at Oakhome.

The kind-hearted villagers had entered so warmly into the whole sad story that they were unanimous in their desire to express the joy they felt at the happy result of the Earl's efforts. No corner in England—save and except Abbey Towers itself—had such right to rejoice this day as Oakhome, for in its very centre had lived many of the principal actors in this drama. Bright, gay bunting was suspended in festoons from house to house and from tree to tree.

Here and there could be read sentences such as "Welcome back to liberty!" "God bless the faithful wife!" "Hurrah for our master!" etc.; and if the Earl winced a little as he read them, and would have preferred that the honest folks had shown more reticence in their greeting, he refrained from saying so, and no one guessed his thoughts.

A crowd of curious and expectant faces had collected in and about the station. Many of them, filled with ardent curiosity, strove to catch a glimpse of the poor, ill-used gentleman; others—women especially—were dying to see how *Lady Leadbitter* bore herself; but there was not one amongst them whose breast swelled with more genuine pride and joy than did that of the honest old coachman, as he sat in his seat of honour, the driving-box of the handsome carriage.

"Ah, *she* done it! *she* done it all!" he kept repeating to himself, as he flicked the flies from the impatient steeds. "Who'd have found it out but for *her*, I'd like to know. Steady, Drosure! Stand still, beauty! Ye'll not have long to wait now, the signal's down."

Others might fear and wonder how they should meet and greet Lady Leadbitter, but old John Ryder had been her staunch friend. He longed to see that the weary look of suffering had left her gentle face for ever; he had no upbraidings of conscience to stifle.

"Here they are! Here they come!" was passed from mouth to mouth, as the long, serpent-like train glided stealthily down the winding track.

Simpson, the footman—poor Yorkshire Mary's ancient enemy—now came prominently forward, and with an air of privileged importance awaited the arrival of the master and his guests. Barely had the engine stopped ere the servant descried those he was in search of, and advancing to the door of the saloon, threw it open, saluting respectfully. Out sprang the Earl, and close upon his heels followed the merry-hearted, genial-faced O'Hagan.

Then hearty cheers in quick succession arose from the throats of the bystanders as Sir Edmund Leadbitter, pale and weak, yet with pleased countenance and a certain dignity of bearing, endeavoured by the aid of his two friends to dismount from the carriage. This accomplished, all three turned again to proffer assistance to the lady—their companion. And now by a curious instinct, as though the crowd would in some way atone for unintentional coldness in the past, hats were raised, handkerchiefs were waved, and a wild enthusiasm seemed to fill their hearts as Lady Leadbitter, taking the hand of the Earl, sprang lightly on to the platform.

For an instant or two the cheering almost ceased, as, breathless with surprise and half concealed doubt, they gazed upon her. Was this elegant and graceful lady *really* the same Marion MacDermot who had toiled and resided in such lowly fashion at the Western Lodge? They pressed forward in eager groups, so as to scan more closely her form and features. Yes, after all, it *must* be the same. But, oh! how changed.

How altered to be sure ! She looked so young and sweet now, as decked in the daintiest of lace and muslin, a large black picture hat shading her happy face, she took her husband's hand and gracefully bowed her acknowledgments of their kindly greeting. Now was the time that many a heart in that crowd felt the sharp stab of bitter self-reproach. Why had they been so harsh in their judgments of her ? How they wished they had bestowed more courtesy, more Christian charity upon poor Marion MacDermot. The Earl looked elated and well, as he shook hands with some and bowed to the rest, remarking to O'Hagan :

“What a pity it is that our little wives are not here to witness this cheering spectacle.”

“I begin to doubt if we shall ever see them again,” sighed O'Hagan playfully. “We might as well make up our minds to life-long celibacy : there's no getting them from those Convent walls once they get ensconced therein.”

“We have one last and unfailing resource ; we'll make the babies ill : that will fetch them, like a shot,” rejoined his companion.

As they neared the carriage, Marion recognised the kindly face of the coachman shaded by the hand in which he held the whip, as in an attitude of leaning forward he looked eagerly towards them. She stepped out in advance, and springing into the carriage knelt upon the seat nearest to him and seizing his other hand clasped it tightly in both her own, exclaiming in a glad, tearful voice, “God bless you, dear old John ! I am so well and happy now.”

"So am I! So am I, my Lady," he repeated quite excitedly. "Ye see, it's all come right at last. I knew—I always said it would. Oh, I've a deal to tell ye, my Lady! I've seen *our* young lady, and she's got her dog, and she's better now."

"My dear husband and I will call and see you, John, and you shall tell us all about it. We are longing to know everything."

"Yes, indeed we are," chimed in Sir Edmund, as he settled himself in the carriage, drawing his wife down tenderly beside him. "I owe you a great—an enormous debt of gratitude, John; and, God helping me, I will repay you."

"You owe me *nothing*, Sir Edmund—no, not a thing. To see her Ladyship's face bright and joyful is enough reward for me!"

"Drive very steadily, Ryder," urged his master. "Sir Edmund cannot stand too much shaking yet, I fear."

"All right, sir!"

Up jumped the footman; and amid numberless good wishes the party drove off to the hospitable roof of Baron Court.

It is often quite marvellous to note how much exertion the weak body can endure when the mind is at rest and the heart filled to overflowing with peace and happiness. Sir Edmund still looked worn and thin, and his fine face bore lines wrought by mental care and bodily endurance; yet he owned to no feeling of fatigue after the somewhat excitable and tedious journey. He spoke but little—appeared, in fact, almost unable

to trust himself to speak at all. His mind seemed engrossed by some overwhelming emotion; one phrase of words alone shaped themselves to his mind; he felt as though he could have sung his heart out in one long *Te Deum*. In his dark hour of trial he had called upon and trusted in God, and had He not both heard and answered him?

He could not endure that Marion should leave his sight for a moment. How he revelled in her kind ministrations—in the touch of her gentle hands, and in listening to the accents of that sweet voice, the mere echo of which had dwelt in his brain during all those lonely hours in his prison cell. No, he could not speak much; he could only mark with rapture untold the joy expressed in her dear eyes, and pressing her hand, *think*, and strive to realise their present and future happiness. It is not easy to imagine, much less to realise, what power to elevate and sustain the heart of man, is contained in the full meaning of the word *freedom*; only those are capable of so doing who, like Edmund Leadbitter, have—through no fault of their own—suffered the loss of it.

In the cool of the evening, as the shadows lengthened, two figures—those of husband and wife—strolled down the western avenue and entered the tiny lodge. Filled with perfect peace seemed the evening hour; hushed and low was the twitter of the birds, and subdued and calm the murmur of the river as it rippled gently o'er its stony bed, as though wishful to rest its waters near

so sweet a spot. The fallow dear, browsing or lying 'neath the cool, shady trees, scarce more than raised their heads as Marion and her dear one sauntered by.

Once more she entered the little cottage. In broken-hearted misery, alone, weary of mind, and fearful of what was in store for her, she had last crossed its portal. Now, with step as light as the heart she bore, her hand fast locked in his for whose freedom she had wept and pined so hopelessly, she stood again within the little kitchen. Everything was just as she had left it; old John had seen to that. The flowers she had trained and tended with such care were fresh and green; a kind old hand had watered them and kept the little home swept and garnished.

The eyes of the husband wandered fondly around. Nothing escaped his keen, sharp glance.

He knew now what her life must have been; he knew that she had toiled, slaved, and saved for him alone. But when she led him into her little parlour and disclosed to him the treasures hidden within the small curtained alcove—the sight of which had a few months since so unmanned his brother—Edmund threw his arms around her; and kneeling together, as they had so frequently done of late, they poured out the fulness of their heart's gratitude in prayer to God.

“All these treasures, dearest wife, must be gathered carefully together. Not one, however small or trifling, must be lost. They shall be carried to our own dear home at ‘Abbey Towers.’”

As they rose he clutched his violin with a yearning grasp and pressed it to him ; he felt—he knew—that, through the power of this old instrument, voice and expression could be given to the various emotions which flooded his inmost soul.

They spent a long time in her little home : she had so much to show him, so many things to tell.

“ See my little bank-book, darling ; though only the balance shall you look at now ; the items we will study later.” How could he speak ! He took the treasure from her hands, kissed her fondly, and pressing the record of her love and sacrifice to his lips, conveyed it reverently to his inner pocket.

Yes, he would study that alone ; and might God forgive him if he did not repay her tenfold for her devotion. The birds were silent ; the deer were sleeping quietly ; the shades of night had fallen ; the little river alone stirred and rippled its running waters on its ceaseless journey downwards, when Marion and her husband retraced their steps to the Court.

They were happy, yes, such happy days—those which Edmund and Marion spent at Baron Court. It was a pleasant and gratifying sight to their kind host to witness the rapid progress to health and strength achieved by the invalid. There were so many beautiful things to see and enjoy—to feast his hungry eyes and ears upon ; but that which seemed to fascinate him and to attract his admiration most, was the very object which had most moved and touched his brother—poor Harold Manfred.

It was the picture of “ The United Kingdom.”

Reverently he gazed upon the pure sweet face of that centre figure—she who had played the part of Destiny in their lives, and had been, as it were, the guardian angel of them both. He never seemed to weary of looking at that fair young face, and blessings rare and precious must descend upon her soul, for he felt he could never pray for her enough.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THEY were seated beneath the shade of a drooping ash, listening with no small interest to Sir Edmund, who was recounting to them incidents of his early life. He told them of the deep affection which existed between himself and his uncle Henry, before the baneful influence of his younger brother and young Thomas marred its happy existence, and how it had always been a source of the greatest wonder to him why and how they had so gradually but surely brought about his certain ruin.

They could hear the lap-lap of the lake as its waters, stirred into ripples by the gentle breeze, beat lazily against its mossy banks; and the busy rattle of the reaping machine, as it felled the golden corn, echoed pleasantly from the opposite hills.

Sir Edmund's face was flushed from an inward sense of pleasure and excitement. To such an intense lover of nature as he had ever been, why, the simple song of a wild bird, the hum of a honey bee, the caw of a rook, the cry of a hound—nay, even the rustle of the summer leaves, possessed a power to stir his soul with that strange thrill of undefined emotion, known only to those who, like himself, had been reared amid Nature's beauties.

And these glorious gifts, these earthly blessings, were restored to him once more ; he might call them his own, might feel them, touch them, walk among them a free man, the acknowledged proprietor of the dear old home, with all its time-worn and treasured belongings. Well might words fail him ; for those who suffer keenly rejoice as deeply.

“ Marion, darling, the agent tells me that in three days from now our home will be ready to receive us, that home which in fevered dreams alone I have visited during these long weary years ; and you, dear wife, shall be at last its little mistress and queen. Together we will stroll among the dear ruins of the ancient Abbey ; and who knows but in time, over the very slab where once the high altar stood, where I, as a helpless infant rested, whilst my father craved for me my uncle’s love and care, and beneath which lay hidden the very deeds that restored to us our peace—who knows, I say, but that out of dear and treasured savings there may one day arise on the hallowed spot another glorious altar, before which we can bow our heads and pour our happy hearts in gratitude and praise.”

She pressed his hand and answered warmly : “ Yes, dear one ; and shall not Father Lawrence be our guest and officiate there ? It is meet that he who shared so much of our sorrow should participate in our joy.”

“ He has promised me most faithfully to visit us often.”

“ What has become of that branch of the Thomas family which has been in possession of the Abbey

Towers for the last few years?" demanded De Woodville.

"My lawyer informed me that at the first rumour of danger they fled, no one knows exactly whither; nor shall I pursue them. I hear they are absolutely penniless, and could never refund to me any part of the sum for which they are responsible. Let me but possess the dear old home once more in peace, and those who injured me may go their way. I shall never molest them."

"Dr. Arno told me," observed O'Hagan smiling "that each year he and his family should for a few months, at least, inhabit his house and estate in England—meaning the Manor Farm, your brother's bequest to him; so you will have him for a neighbour; and he is a very pleasant sort of a man. I liked him."

"Yes. And he shall also visit the home of her whose life he so skilfully saved. On her account alone we all owe him an immense debt of gratitude," said the Earl.

"Never will friends be dearer to us than those who stood by my wife and me in our day of trial and dishonour," remarked Sir Edmund, deeply moved.

"We shall accompany you home, Leadbitter, and from all I gather your reception there is likely to be right royal in its endeavour to do you honour. I hear on good authority that the tenants are thoroughly disgusted and tired of the dominion of the usurpers, and long for a scion of the old house to reign over them once more. They are full of impatience to welcome you back; and wherever

you are seen for some time now you will be marked man. Seldom have I read of or heard half so much public sympathy or feeling expressed in any individual case before."

"Nor I," chimed in O'Hagan. "From north to south of the British Isles every paper has had its say, and rejoices that you are free. Thousands will be glad to look upon you—would be proud to shake you by the hand."

Sir Edmund bowed his head. This spontaneous outpouring of his countrymen's hearts was sweet to him; for of their own free will they acknowledged now that not only had they condemned him wrongfully, but that his *honour* was untarnished.

"A telegram, father!" cried the voice of little Grantheuse, the son and heir, as he bounded into their midst, bearing the missive in his hand. "Open it quickly!" he added, "it may be from dear little mother, to say she is coming home."

De Woodville's face lit up as he read it aloud: "We are returning to Baron Court to-morrow; little Margaret alone remains—MARIE and MADGE."

Now there was stir and bustle within the Court and joy in every heart; only a pang shot through O'Hagan's breast: he would miss his little girl. Madge must tell him why she stayed behind.

Yes, she would tell him with what persistence the little school friends entreated that Margaret the Third might remain longer with them; and what a pretty picture the child made as, surrounded by a crowd of girls about her own age, she stood in an attitude of hesitation, divided, it seemed,

Between a sense of the pleasure a prolonged visit amid such congenial companionship would afford, and a doubt as to whether, for her own pleasure, she were not tempted to neglect the dear ones at home. But, as usual, Lady Abbess came to the rescue, and uniting her petition to that of the children, promised to see that every care was lavished upon the child and, all being well, she should in a few weeks return to the home that cherished her so fondly.

Then Madge, with the words of old Father Egbert still ringing in her heart, yielded a cheerful assent to their wishes, leaving her darling bright and happy in the kind home that had been her own when none other had offered her shelter. She felt sure that the gentle spirit of dear Margaret the First would watch over and guard her little grandchild.

Nor must Madge omit to tell her husband of the half-defiant tone in which old Mary expressed her sentiments, when she heard of the new plan of their movements.

“Well, I’m blessed!” she exclaimed in a tone of open disapproval. “What ivver is there, I’d like to know, about this ’ere spot that it fair bewitches every one and sends then clean daft? Why, here’s me own little bairnie nigh as far gone over it as her poor mother was afore her. But”—very decidedly—“I’ll stop and see the end of this ’ere plot anyhow—that I will! and”—turning to her mistress, and speaking loudly so that all might hear and understand—“I’ll bring her back to ye safe and sound, see if I don’t. I’ll do be her, as I did be

her mother afore her; aye, and be her grandmother, too, for the matter o' that. Them as deals with aught under Mary's charge had best be fair and square, above board! There, now. I've had me say and feel easier for it." And so we part with poor old Yorkshire Mary—one whose rough tongue hid a true and faithful heart. Would that there were more like her!

And she, who has played such a prominent part in these pages! Well, we will leave her to Him for whom she lives. We have ventured to raise the veil—for a brief space only—which hides the life of one of England's daughters. In this world of ours there are many who, like Sister Marguerite, are hidden heroines, and they know it not. So from us she shall receive neither praise nor renown. For her sake we will try to look upon her life in the light in which she views it—as of little value, her generous deeds but acts of necessary duty. But she cannot prevent our hearts from rejoicing with a secret joy when we contemplate the sweet surprise that will inundate her humble soul when He, for whom she has wrought such deeds of charity, shall mete to her, in His own measure, her eternal reward.

THE END.

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